PRINCE, PATRIOT, PARLIAMENTARIAN

Biography of Dr. Karni Singh
Maharaja of Bikaner

RIMA HOOJA

Foreword by
Countess Mountbatten of Burma



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Author's Note & Acknowledgements



MY FIRST VISIT TO BIKANER WAS IN THE WINTER OF 1972-73 HAVING JUST completed the Indian School Certificate (ISC) school-leaving examination a few short weeks previously, my cousin Sunita, who was visiting from Delhi, and I had both jumped at the idea of accompanying my father on one of his official tours to Bikaner The visit was a grand success. While my father attended to his work, my cousin and I went sight-seeing with the wholehearted gusto one can expect from a pair of sixteen-year-olds who have just finished school. Among the many places we went to were the Old Fort, the Camel Breeding Centre, a film-show, the inaugural of a community-centre in a nearby village, and the local jail (not as inmates, I hasten to add, but as genuinely curious visitors who wanted to see a real jail!) The visit was fateful. It was in the course of that trip to Bikaner that I met a British archaeologist-couple, Raymond and Bridget Allchin from Cambridge and their geographer-colleague, Andrew Goudie from Oxford for the first time, and decided to follow up my interest in archaeology by taking to that discipline as a career. (Some years later, when I won a Commonwealth Scholarship to UK, it was Dr. Raymond Allchin who became my Ph.D supervisor at Cambridge University.)

It was also during the course of that visit to Bikaner that, having

received permission to look around the beautiful Lallgarh Palace (the personal property and residence of the Bikaner rulers), my cousin and I had a brief meeting with Dr. Karni Singh, M.P. and Maharaja of Bikaner When our sightseeing mini-party (enlarged by the presence of the then Collector's wife and son, and others) was spotted following our 'guide' through the corridors of Lallgarh Palace by Dr. Karni Singh, he stopped us and with the courtesy and charm that was an inherent part of his character (as I would discover later while writing this biography), began a conversation. He asked my cousin and me about ourselves and what we wanted to study next; he told me that he was acquainted with my father and that his cousin from Kota had gone to the same school as I (the Maharani Gayatri Devi Girls' Public School, Jaipur); he was thrilled to learn about my cousin's shikar experiences with a double-bore and .22 rifle and suggested she take to target-shooting In short, he chatted with both of us cousins for close to twenty minutes like a fond uncle and asked our 'guide' to show us a special crystal boat. Shortly afterwards, when at the end of our visit my cousin and I, trailed hesitantly by the rest of the party, walked across the Lallgarh lawns to politely thank him for his kindness, the Maharaja stood up and invited our group to join him for a Coca Cola or tea, if we preferred. Our cup of joy was full to the brim at the Maharaja's courtesy. That short meeting left such a lasting impression on me that when, nearly two decades later, I was approached for writing the biography of Dr. Karni Singh, I accepted.

The present biography is a work I was specially commissioned to write by Princess Rajyashree Kumari of Bikaner. The Princess was not only generous with her time and support throughout the writing of the book, but also arranged interviews with several members of the family and staff of her father, the late Maharaja His Highness Dr. Karni Singh of Bikaner. In addition, she also facilitated access to relevant material (including a number of audio-cassette tapes), both in her own personal possession and that in the archives of the Shri Sadul Singh Museum, Bikaner and the Maharaja Ganga Singhji Trust.

I am also grateful to both the Maharaja Ganga Singhji Trust and the Shri Sadul Singh Museum, Bikaner, for making available old records and files for my research. I also owe my thanks to the executors of late Dr Karni Singh and his publishers, M/s Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd , New Delhi, for permission to quote from Dr. Karni Singh's books *'The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers: 1465-*

1949' (pub. 1974) and *'From Rome to Moscow: The Memoirs of an Olympic Trap Shooter'* (pub. 1982).

The book would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of a number of people. Among them, I would specially like to thank Rajmata Sushila Kumari of Bikaner, Maharani Padma Kumari of Bikaner, Karni Singhji's sister, Rajmata Sushila Kumari of Udaipur and brother, Shri Amar Singh Rathore (who insisted I could acknowledge his assistance only if I referred to him sans his erstwhile titles!), Maharaj Raj Singh Dungarpur, brother-in-law of Dr Karni Singh, and at Kota, Karni Singh's aunt, Rajmata Shiv Kumari of Kota. Among Dr. Karni Singh's grandchildren, I must thank Anupama Kumari, Siddhi Kumari, Mahima Kumari and Daksha Kumari for sharing their memories of a dearly loved grandfather with a stranger.

At Bikaner, I am also grateful to Brigadier Kanwar Bag Singh of Daudsar (M.B.E., A.D.C.) for sharing some of his memories of Bikaner and its 23rd Maharaja, going back to the time of Maharaja Ganga Singh, and to Thakur Dalip Singh, Thakur Hanuwant Singh and Shri Chander Dan Charan, as well as to Shri Asu Ram, who played cricket with Bhanwar Karni Singh and later saw over forty years of service with the grown-up Maharaja. The whole-hearted assistance of Shri Mahavir Prasad Gill and Shri Raghu Modi of the Shri Sadul Singh Museum, Lallgarh Palace, Bikaner, in locating dusty files and elusive cross-references is also gratefully acknowledged.

Among others, at Jaipur I would like to acknowledge, in particular, Shri Chandra Singh Bhati for sharing his knowledge about the Bikaner during Maharaja Sadul Singh's reign, and Shri and Shrimati Bhim Singh and their daughter, my former MGD schoolmate, Madhuwanti Singh, for going out of their way to assist and facilitate my work. I must also thank my parents — B. Hooja and Usha Rani, and other family-members — Rakesh, Meenakshi, Rajat and Rakshat, who had to perforce share my progress on the biography with their evening-meals, as well as Jagdish Bhai and Darshan Bhabhi who 'participated' in the work several times a week, whenever they came to call.

I also got the help of a number of scholars, bureaucrats, doctors, and others who had served in Bikaner or come into contact with Maharaja Karni Singh. They are too numerous to be named individually, but their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. During the writing of this book, various colleagues at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Jaipur,

and Kota Open University, Kota, provided much needed support. I would be failing in my duty if I did not acknowledge the tremendous support of Shri G.G. Rajan Nair and Ms. Rachel Varkey of IDS for their assistance with the computer formatting and printing-out of the text. Finally, I must thank my Editor for all her hard work, and ruefully accept that any flaws that are present are the responsibility of no one but myself!

Rima Hooja

Foreword



IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE TO ME TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO WRITE THIS Foreword for the biography of His Late Highness of Bikaner, because of the close links our families have enjoyed, going back several generations to the beginning of this century At that time, in 1907, His Highness Maharaja Sadul Singh and my father were very young children and met when they were all visiting my father's Uncle, the Grand Duke of Hesse, in Germany.

The friendship continued in 1921 when they were both very young men and my father was accompanying his cousin Edward, Prince of Wales, on his tour of India, which included a visit to Bikaner.

When my father was Viceroy in 1947 my husband, (Lord Brabourne), sister Pamela and I accompanied our parents on a never-to-be-forgotten visit to Bikaner.

In the pre-war years my parents-in-law and the Maharajah's family had also formed a friendship when Lord Brabourne was Governor of Bombay, and later of Bengal before he died in Calcutta in 1939

In later years His Highness visited my father whenever he came to England, and we have also remained friends with his daughter, Princess Rajyashree.

I am sure this book will interest a great many people and be a tribute to a great man who did so much for his State.

Countess Mountbatten of Burma
CBE, CD, JP, DL

Preface



MY FATHER HAD THE RARE AND WONDERFUL ABILITY TO GET ON WITH all whom he met. Over the years I was witness to this, it could be young school boys playing a game of football in the dust outside Gajner Palace or his constituents who wanted to draw his attention to their problems, people in foreign countries, members of his family and countless others who all received his courteous attention In Bikaner, we could never go anywhere without him being recognized and he always stopped and spoke to the people who collected rapidly around him. As a child I found this very irritating, we could never go anywhere without my father stopping to chat to those who wanted to meet him

It is only now that that I truly appreciate the quality of the man who was able to to relate so effortlessly to so many people of different backgrounds, ages and abilities, his good will endures till today It is now nine years since my father died but even today I meet people all over the world who knew him and the minute that they find out that I am his daughter, they smile and want to share their memories of him with me They could have been his parliamentary colleagues, or used to shoot with him or played golf with him On one of my flights to India I was talking to the lady sitting next to me and it turned out that she was related to the clay pigeon champion Mansher Singh and knew of my father, she praised him for his patient coaching of young shooters and the immense encouragement that he gave them to achieve good results in the sport Soon after my father died I happened to sell my flat in Delhi. The buyer and his

lawyer both came down to Bikaner to complete the formalities. Within minutes of the paper work being completed it appeared that the buyer played golf with my father in Delhi and his lawyer's maternal grandfather used to shoot with him in the early days. The good will left behind by him endures till today and is a wonderful tribute to him.

My father always meant to write his autobiography and being the very methodical man that he was, he kept records and notes all his life and in later years recorded his memoirs in audio cassettes. Due to the busy life that he led he never got around to it. I felt that it was important to get this biography published, there was so much to this multi-faceted personality that many people would be interested to read about. It was with this in mind that I was introduced to the author Dr. Rima Hooja by a mutual friend As we sat and chatted she told me that many years ago as a student in school she and a cousin had gone to visit Lallgarh Palace while they were in Bikaner. They wanted to meet my father and despite his busy schedule he found time for them and then took them around the palace on a personally guided tour. She was very appreciative of the fact that he had taken the time to show two young students around. That is the kind of person he was and managed to find time in his busy *world for old fashioned courtesies and politeness and consideration that* not many people are concerned with today

My father was a very patient man and so was a very good coach and teacher. He taught us all to shoot from a very young age and to play tennis and many other things. His knowledge was great and he was very generous to share it with those he came in contact with. If he was interested in something then he took the trouble to research the details very carefully. Many people over the years would come to Bikaner to his range to learn to shoot. Youngsters were patiently introduced to the sport, more experienced shooters were able to refine the art by his very careful and painstaking coaching.

That he was a wonderful shot most people are well aware of, not all of it was serious, however I recall the time that he returned from a trip to Europe and brought back with him two recoil reducers for my gun These were small cylinders that fitted into the stock of the gun, and helped to reduce the kick when a shot was fired. My father was very aware that heavy recoil was not only damaging but very off putting as well, as it could make a shooter's start to flinch before firing and this would adversely affect his or her shooting ability. The recoil reducers were then

ceremonially fitted into my gun and then I was asked to shoot a round to see if it was an improvement on the previous ones. It seemed that this was not the case as the very next day I had a huge blue bruise on my right cheek. My father was very put out by this and felt that he had to communicate his displeasure to the manufacturers. Long and detailed notes were dictated to his secretary and then for visual proof I was asked to stand still while my profile was photographed to show them what damage their recoil reducers had done to me. It was extremely embarrassing for me, and I am not quite sure what they made of this when they received all the documentation. My father was not put off his stride in the least bit by this.

Living with and travelling with my father over the years was always a bit of an adventure. He was invariably calm in the face of dramatic events which made us panic all the more. We were involved in train derailments, burglaries and all manner of things The only time I saw him speechless was when a tiny little mouse decided to make his bedding case into a nursery for her family In the middle of serious packing we all discovered this family of tiny baby mice all cosily snuggled up in his bedding case. Needless to say alternative arrangements had to be made. More recently, on our way home one day in Bikaner my father stopped the car when he saw a banded krait, a very poisonous desert snake by the side of the road. Standing nearby was a young goatheard looking after his flock. My father gave him instructions that he should immediately kill the snake. The boy was galvanized into action and took his very large stick and started to hit everything in sight with zeal, except of course the snake. The snake changed direction and headed straight for our car We all watched horrified as it went under one end and several moments later had still not emerged the other side At this point my father casually informed us that the Indian Fiat was full of holes through which the very thin snake could wriggle in. Greatly alarmed we all jumped out of the car and left it to the driver to do something. He immediately shook the car vigorously to dislodge the snake which had obviously coiled itself in the pipes under the car. After several minutes of this when the snake refused to budge, we all decided to walk home. Wondering what might happen if the snake was never found, my father solemnly informed us that in which case the car would have to be sold

Knowing full well how his ancestors had for generations served the people of Bikaner and how much they looked up to the head of the clan,

he felt very limited in how he in turn could be of service to his people in a modern world. It was with this in mind that he turned to politics, hoping that through being an MP he could assist the people of Bikaner, and over the years he strove very hard to bring about many beneficial changes. I think that my father felt the heavy burden of the responsibility that history had placed on his shoulders. He had seen a great many changes in his lifetime. From the time that he was born the long awaited grandson of his powerful grandfather Maharaja Ganga Singhji, and having lived through the good old days went on to see the various changes that came to him and his family. He was always optimistic and more importantly realistic, he brought us up as modern Indian citizens, and tried to make sure that we had a good education and did not live in the past glories He knew that many more changes would come our way and the more able we were to cope with them as time went by the better it would be for us

When the privy purses and privileges were abolished by Mrs. Gandhi's government he was, I think, very deeply hurt by it, not personally for himself but for the fact that the country could so easily break solemn pledges that were given to his father and other princes. The Indian princes had handed over all their states and assets to the union of India without any trouble or bloodshed and in return hoped that they would uphold the pledges that were given to them. More importantly, just as it broke my grandfather's heart when he signed the instrument of accession, my father was more than aware of how history would judge him Always a very modest man he felt that he was the caretaker of all the family history and the forts and palaces that were inherited by him from his ancestors This weighed very heavily on him at all times. I think that he was never the same after that, there was an air of sadness about him that had not been there before. However, every inch the Rajput that he was by birth, he stood up and made a most stirring speech in Parliament on the privy purse debate. I was there at the time to hear him speak and felt an immense sense of pride to see him take a strong stand on behalf of his brother princes and himself.

Sadly for us all he was still only 64 when he suddenly died in 1988, there was much that he wanted to do and was not able to complete. For me it was a great loss as we were very close. He was a very loving and caring father and took the trouble of making our childhood a very golden and happy one. Despite all his worries and problems he always found

time for us and made life fun, while at the same time teaching us the right values and responsibilities in life. Now when I return to Lallgarh Palace our childhood home, it is the same in appearance but without my father the spirit and heart of the palace is now no longer there. I hope that through the various charitable institutions that he set up in his lifetime his vision will be kept alive and that he will be remembered for being a prince who till the last, thought of his people and what he could do for them. This book is dedicated to a much loved and much missed father.

Rajyashree Kumari of Bikaner

Prologue



ALL AROUND LAY MILES UPON MILES OF HARSH DESERT TERRAIN THIS was the *Marudhar*, 'land of death', — the grim Thar desert region of the Indian subcontinent. However, as Karniji raised her hand to bless Rao Bika, the second eldest surviving son of Rao Jodha, the Rathore ruler of Marwar, Bika and his band of co-travellers forgot their surroundings and the fatigue of the long days and nights of marching across the vast desert tracts and months of skirmishes and battles to establish themselves in a new land.

For, the fame of the miracles and powers of clairvoyance of this holy lady had already spread far, and now Karniji was prophesising that Prince Bika would surpass his father in might and glory and many would acknowledge his overlordship. "Your destiny is higher than your father's", Karniji told the Prince, "and many servants will touch your feet".

Fleetingly, Prince Bika recalled that eventful day at the Jodhpur court of his father, Rao Jodha, the ruler of Marwar. Arriving late at the *durbar*, Bika had quickly saluted his father according to etiquette, and found a seat next to Rao Kandhal, one of his paternal uncles. That the subsequent whispered conversation between Bika and Kandhal had become too lengthy and irked their monarch was brought home to them suddenly, when Rao Jodha loudly inquired whether the uncle-nephew duo were planning future territorial conquests for the glory of their clan Such a taunt could, in keeping with the times, merit but one answer! Thus, Rao

Bika and uncle Kandhal had accepted the challenge, pledging before the assembled courtiers never to return to Jodhpur until they had subjugated new lands.

It had, perhaps, been fortuitous that Napa, a Rajput belonging to the Sankhla clan, had been present at court that day. For Napa Sankhla was the former chief of Janglu, to the north of Marwar. He had been dispossessed by stronger Bilochi neighbours, and it was he who stood up in court to suggest that Bika and Kandhal turn their attention towards Janglu and the territories to the north. He had also offered to guide their expedition across the desert wastes.

And so it had come about that on September, 30, 1465 A.D. Prince Bika had ridden out from Jodhpur, capital of Marwar, accompanied by a band of nobles and warriors. With him rode his uncles Kandhal, Rupa, Mandalo and Nathu, and his brothers Joga and Bida. Also part of the expedition were many other supporters, including Napa Sankhla and Parihar Bela, his Master of horses, along with a force of one hundred cavalry and five hundred foot soldiers Among the group were officers, scribes and merchants — the core for a future administration in a new land.

At a short distance from the newly built city of Jodhpur lay Mandore, an older capital of the Rathores, where their family deity was enshrined. Prince Bika's expedition had stopped here briefly on the first day's march to offer worship at the shrine. Then, with stern determination, they had continued their journey northwards — towards Janglu, and the land known in tradition as Jangal-pradesh, and, if necessary, even beyond.

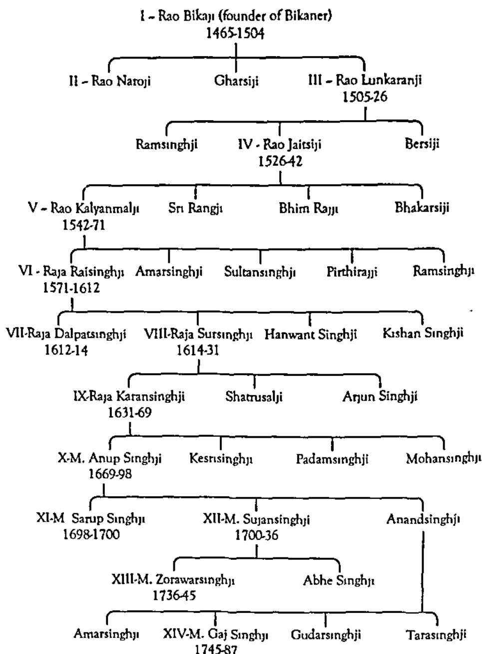
It was a long road, entailing the use of both sword and diplomacy, that they had tread before eventually coming to Janglu, and later Deshnoke, where Karniji was now foretelling future greatness for Rao Bika.

It was, as yet, an incomplete journey, but one that would lead to the carving out of a new kingdom. A kingdom that was to bear the name of the Rathore prince who founded it — Bikaner. A kingdom that would exist for nearly five hundred years, until its eventual voluntary accession to the new nation-state of India in 1947 A.D. A kingdom which, though geographically somewhat marginal, would nonetheless, play a pivotal role in the affairs of the subcontinent from time to time. And a kingdom that would, over the centuries, throw up not only many great warriors and

kings, but also innumerable scholars, soldiers, statesmen, artists, artisans, poets, merchants, traders, and hardy pastoralists and farmers.

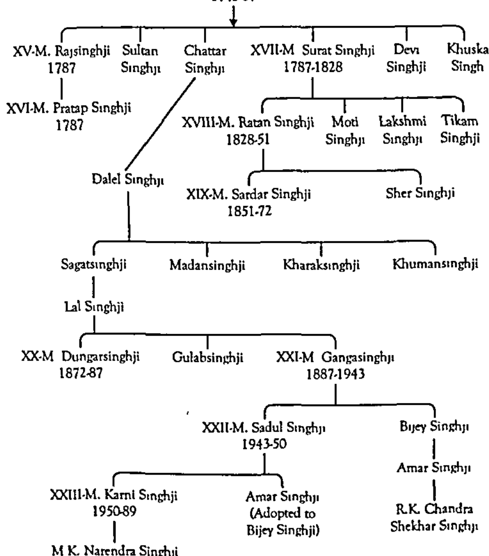
All that lay in the future, as Rao Bika knelt before Karniji. This holy lady from the Charan community would be deified as an emanation or incarnation of the mother-goddess within her lifetime. She was to become the patron-deity of the House of Bikaner. And it is her name that would one day be borne by the man who would be the last anointed Maharaja of Bikaner to be officially so recognised by the Republic of India — Karni Singh.

GENEALOGICAL TREE OF THE HOUSE OF BIKANER



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One

INHERITANCE OF A PRINCE



"ON THE 21ST OF APRIL, 1924, THERE WAS A TREMENDOUS SPLASH OF water and Rajvi Gulab Singh [one of the highranking nobles at the court of Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner] was bundled into the swimming pool in celebration of my birth! That I should have been the lucky man that caused the splash of water was something I was to learn years later." It was with these words, nearly sixty years after the event, that Dr. Karni Singh of Bikaner was to record the euphoria that had marked his birth.

The date according to the Indian *Vikram Samvat* calendar was Baisakh sudi 2, 1981 V.S., and a son had been born to the crown-prince and princess of Bikaner, Maharaj-Kumar Sadul Singh and the Yuvrani Sudarshan Kumari. The boy would grow up to be Maharaja Karni Singh, the 23rd Maharaja of Bikaner. He would also become a Member of the Indian Parliament, obtain a Ph.D, win international recognition as an ace Olympian marksman, and earn the respect and affection of many.

This child, a scion of the ruling family of Bikaner, was the first grandson of Maharaja Ganga Singh, the ruler of Bikaner. He was also a Rathore Rajput

The Rathores were *suryavanshi kshatriyas* — warriors claiming descent from Surya, the sun. They formed one of the thirty-six clans that were known as 'Rajputs' – sons of kings – in medieval India. Their genealogies

traced their ancestry back to the legendary heroes of the Indian epics and to the brave kings of the solar dynasty that had found constant reference in the Puranas and other ancient Indian literature.

Their chroniclers linked the Rathores with the resplendent kingdom of Kanauj, in northern India, which had once been master of a large part of the Indo-Gangetic plain. According to these chroniclers, Jai Chand was the last great ruler of Kanauj, a kingdom which an early forebear, Nayan Pal, had conquered in 470 AD.

Some scholars connect the Rathores with the Rashtrakutas, an imperial dynasty that established itself in the Deccan plateau during the early 8th century AD. Rashtrakuta inscriptions refer to the assumption of imperial titles by Dantidurga Khadgavaloka by 753AD, and to one of his descendants, Dhruva I, extending Rashtrakuta power as far northwards as Ujjain in present-day Madhya Pradesh.

Be that as it may for historians, it does not, however, appear to have been an issue to vex the minds of the keepers of traditional genealogies of the Rathores. They lay more stress on events that occurred around the end of the 12th century AD, when, in the final decades of the 12th century, Kanauj under Jai Chand came into conflict with the growing power of Prithviraj III, the Chauhan ruler of the Delhi-Ajmer region. Both Jai Chand and Prithviraj were charismatic leaders, renowned for their bravery and valour on the battlefield. The intense rivalry between the two Rajputs coincided with the expansionist expeditions into the Indian subcontinent by Mohammed of Ghor. In 1192, the forces of Prithviraj Chauhan were defeated by Mohammed of Ghor in the Second Battle of Tarain, though only a year earlier, in 1191, it had been the Ghor forces that had been vanquished on the same battlefield.

Two years later, in 1194, it was the turn of Jai Chand to face Mohammed of Ghor, and the might of 'imperial' Kanauj was broken on the battleground of Chandwar. By 1212 AD, eighteen years after the overthrow of Kanauj, circumstances forced the grandsons of Jai Chand to abandon their ancestral kingdom. The kingdom was to survive merely twelve years more, before it was merged into the growing boundaries of the nascent Sultanate of Delhi.

One branch of the family, in possession of certain heirlooms from Kanauj — heirlooms that were eventually to find their way to Bikaner — journeyed westwards and eventually settled in Marwar, an arid, desert part of the region that forms present-day Rajasthan.

Rajasthan, an area also referred to earlier as Rajputana, or land of Rajputs, lies in the western part of the subcontinent. In the thirteenth century it was a large area, divided into many large and small kingdoms ruled over by different clans, both Rajput and others. An ancient hill range — the Aravalli — runs across the land diagonally in a northeast to southwest direction. This separates an arid north-western part from a more fertile river-fed south-eastern part. The former, with its Thar desert and adjoining arid tracts includes the region known as Marwar — the land of sand and sand-dunes; the land of thirst.

It was to this land that the Rathores came. And it was from here that they would rise to a position of prestige, power and paramountcy. Within a short time this branch had established its suzerainty in the area. The emigres from Kanauj had found their home!

The Marwar Rathores soon built up a reputation as fearless warriors. They were the *Ran Banka Rathore* — 'the Beaux in Battle'; invincible on the battle-ground.

The first of the clan, Siha, son of Set Ram, who came to Marwar about 1243AD, died master of the rich trading city of Pali. He took the title of 'Rao', a tradition to be followed by future Rathore rulers and chieftains for many centuries to come. His immediate descendants added to the lands under Rathore control. Most, as a norm, meeting their end on various battlegrounds. They are listed and described in the bardic accounts of the Charans as brave warriors; hardy, simple, proud and god-fearing

Among such men were Rao Raipal, who shared out his grain with his subjects during a severe famine, and Prince Pabuji, who died protecting a herd of cows, thereby honouring his pledged word. The latter has been immortalised in Rajasthani memory and is regarded as one of the five deified warrior-saints of Rajasthan, along with Gogaji, Tejaji, Ramdeoji and Harbhuji.

Successive warrior-princes, among them men like Rao Chunda, the twelfth Rathore to rule in Marwar, led the clan to greater glories. As the territories and prestige of the Rathores grew, however, so did the inevitable skirmishes and clashes with neighbours and other kingdoms, along with the equally inevitable matrimonial alliances and pacts of friendship.

One such alliance in the early part of the 15th century led to a falling out between Marwar and the kingdom of Mewar. As a consequence, Marwar's capital city, Mandore — an ancient fortress that was popularly

believed to be as old as the events of the epic *Ramayana* itself — and the surrounding lands were occupied by Mewar's armies. After several years of fighting, the Rathore Prince Jodha eventually wrested back control of Mandore and his patrimony in 1453 AD.

A few years later (in 1459), Rao Jodha commenced work on a new capital city for Marwar. Located some six miles south of Mandore, the new capital took its name from its founder. Thus, Rao Jodha's city of Jodhpur came into being. As long as the Rathores ruled over Marwar, Jodhpur would remain its capital city, and even today it is a major city of Rajasthan.

Rao Jodha, like his predecessors, was an ambitious and fearless man. So too were his fourteen sons, many surviving brothers, and innumerable clansmen — all veterans of many a battle and skirmish. Prince Bika, the Rao's second eldest surviving son, was one such man.

The Rathore clan had grown both in strength and in number in the two centuries or so that had passed since their ancestors had arrived in Marwar. It had thus become customary with younger sons, or disinherited ones, to seek their own fortunes, or to accept the grant of certain lands as their patrimony. Sometimes sub-clans, known as *khanps*, had come into being, usually named after particularly brave warriors. As members of the clan, they and their descendants would respond to the summons of their ruler, when called upon. However, the fact that the king was *primus inter pares*, first among his clan peers, was never lost sight of!

Not surprisingly, therefore, Prince Bika's decision to conquer further lands was welcomed by his father. The challenge accepted in court by the prince and his royal uncle to leave Jodhpur and go forth to new lands is now part of Bikaneri lore! Whatever be the real reasons for the expedition, Bika parted on cordial terms from his father.

The area that was to form the new kingdom of Bikaner had been populated and ruled by many different peoples in the centuries preceding the advent of the Rathores. When Bika arrived in the region in the 15th century, it was divided into numerous segments under local chiefs. The ruling groups included Johiyas, Chauhans, Sankhlas, Parmars, Bhatis (and Bhattis), and Jats. The precise boundaries of their respective territories and their periods of supremacy had fluctuated over time. Barring the Jats, the other ruling groups were of Rajput descent, (some of whom, like the Johiyas and Bhattis, had accepted Islam). And all of them had a warlike tradition!

Consequently, Bika engaged in incessant warfare before his overlordship was accepted by the earlier inhabitants of the area. Rao Bika was also fortunate enough to obtain the blessings and support of Karniji, a living saint born in the Charan community, who had performed miracles from her early childhood. Following the advice of Karniji, Rao Bika initially established his base at Chandasar in Janglu. Three years later he moved to Deshnoke, where the saint herself lived. Finally, Bika proclaimed himself king in 1472 with Kodamdesar as his capital.

Fortunes of war, a judicious matrimonial alliance and diplomacy having given the Rathores under Bika an upper hand, he decided on a more appropriate site for his capital city. A place called Rati Ghati was found to be suitable and work began on a fort at this spot. In its vicinity Bika founded his new capital city in 1488, a city named, appropriately enough after its founder as Bikaner — the city of Bika.

As the frontiers of Bika's kingdom continued to expand, the new Rathore state came into conflict with the Sultanate of Delhi It was in one such battle against one of the Sultanate's governors that Bika's uncle Kandhal — a grand old man of 73 — fell fighting gallantly His death was avenged by joint action on part of Kandhal's brother, the aged Rao Jodha from the parent-state of Marwar, and his nephew Rao Bika of Bikaner. Both rulers personally led their forces and in a fiercely fought battle at Dronpur, that saw heavy losses on both sides, put Delhi's imperial troops to flight. The Rajput code of honour demanded no less!

It was a code that stressed chivalry, honour, justice, loyalty and valour. A code that lauded keeping one's pledged word even at the cost of one's own life, and revenging an injustice, or even a slight — real or imagined! Of course, the code was transgressed on occasions. Transgression, however, meant universal condemnation, for which forgiveness came only through a glorious death in battle or a redeeming act of a clansman or descendant.

Though the parent-state and collateral-state had joined hands over an issue of clan-honour, their future relations over the next few centuries would always be rocky. On occasions they were even to besiege each others' capitals, (though neither Bikaner nor Marwar would ever loose sight of the fact that they were bound by ties of blood and kinship)

The first such incident occurred soon after the deaths of Rao Jodha of Marwar and his eldest son, Rao Satal, a short-reigning warrior hero After their joint victory at Dronpur, records Powlett's *Gazetteer*, Rao

Jodha had commended his son for his valour. Bika had, by his exploits, "... filled his father's heart with delight; ...his father now asked two things of him". The first was that he should give up a certain tract to Jodhpur. The second "...that he should remain content with what he had won, and never seek to deprive his brothers in Jodhpur of any part of their patrimony".

" 'Promise me this', added the old chief, and Bika dutifully replied that he would never take Jodhpur from his brothers, and, notwithstanding that he could not admit that his father had any right to Ladno [the tract asked for], he would freely give up that too. But he must beg that the cherished family heirlooms, the throne, the royal umbrella brought from Kanauj and other objects of veneration, be sent to him if he became the eldest member of the family. Jodha promised that these be sent".

As the eldest surviving son of the old Rao, Bika now asked for the cherished heirloom emblems of royalty which, as per his father's pledged word, he had already been promised in the eventuality of his older brother's demise. When the younger brother, Rao Sujo, the new ruler of Marwar refused to comply, Rao Bika laid siege to Jodhpur. Eventually Sujo's mother, Jasmade approached her step-son and entreated him to lift the siege. Bika agreed, on condition that the heirlooms were handed over to him. This being done, Rao Bika lifted the siege and returned to Bikaner in triumph, bearing the ancient heirlooms that linked the Rathores to their old imperial glory.

Among these heirlooms was the sandalwood throne on which past ancestors had been crowned It was on this ancient sandalwood throne that Karni Singh would be enthroned in 1950 AD as the 23rd Maharaja of Bikaner.

Bika's successors followed in the traditional footsteps of their ancestors. Rao Lunkaran, for instance, was renowned not only for his military exploits, but also his patronage of scholars and for his gifts to charity. In his reign the capital of Bikaner was acknowledged for its civilised court, to which many chiefs came to pledge their loyalty. Constantly striving to extend the frontiers of his kingdom, Lunkaran met his end on the battlefield as befitting a warrior, fighting the forces of the Nawab of Narnaul at Dhosi, three miles from the walls of Narnaul itself.

His heroism became immortalised in folklore. Four centuries later, Tessitori, an Italian historian resident at Bikaner in the early 1900's, was to describe Lunkaran's final moments dramatically with a description

of how "...like a wounded boar, he throws himself into the middle of the enemy army and falls transfixed by a hundred spears". With Lunkaran perished three of his sons and many clansmen.

His successor, Rao Jaitsi, was crowned in the spring of 1526, shortly before north India witnessed the momentous First Battle of Panipat where the forces of the Delhi Sultanate's Ibrahim Lodi were beaten by the Mughal conquistador from Kabul and Samarkand — Babur. While Jaitsi rebuilt the might of Bikaner, the Mughal dynasty established itself as master of much of northern India. By 1538, it was the turn of proud Bikaner to face the might of the Mughals, when Prince Kamran, a brother of the Mughal Emperor Humayun, personally led the siege of Bikaner.

At this point, legend tells us, the sword of the Rathores was strengthened by the divine intervention of their patron-deity, Karniji. The traditional balladeers sing of how it seemed to the Mughal army as if the battlefield was occupied not by Bikaneri soldiers but thousands of Charan women. The besieging Mughal army retreated in a hurry, fleeing in the direction of Lahore to the north-west. So demoralised was the Mughal force, and so urgent was its desire to quit Rajputana, that when Prince Kamran's royal umbrella fell near the village of Chotriya, no one stopped to pick it up and return it to the Mughal prince. In thanksgiving, Rao Jaitsi bestowed the village of Chotriya upon the Charans from whose family Karniji hailed, and the regal Mughal umbrella, a memento of a long-ago Bikaner victory, is still preserved at Chotriya

Meanwhile, relations between Bikaner and its old parent-state of Marwar had once again worsened In 1542, Marwar's famous Rao Maldeo besieged Bikaner, and Bikaner's Rao Jaitsi was killed. (Maldeo himself was soon to clash with Sher Shah Suri, the short-reigning Emperor who briefly ousted the Mughals).

Jaitsi's reign saw a period of prosperity for Bikaner. Long-distance trade flourished and the small city of Bikaner became a large and prosperous settlement. A translation of the old records led Tessitori to provide a graphic description of Bikaner in Jaitsi's reign. Here one saw " so much silk that you really wonder if this is Jangal country or not rather Kashmir. Everywhere beautiful women full of grace and modesty, everywhere fierce looking warriors used to handling the sword, everywhere stables of horses, everywhere gold and all kinds of wealth And how beautiful the city with its rich bazar crowded by merchants, lords of lakhs, its neat balconies, its unconquerable ramparts, its impassable

moat, its tanks brimming with water."

As the Mughal Empire continued to establish its supremacy over much of the Indian sub-continent, Jaitsi's successors made their peace with it. In the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, Bikaner's Rao Kalyanmal, and after him his successor, Rai Singh (who was the first ruler of Bikaner to bear the title of 'Raja'), accepted the Emperor's policy of friendship and co-operation. This stood the Rathore state in good stead over the next two centuries. The Bikaner kings were granted high ranks and honour, including *mansabdaris*, by the Mughal imperial court.

Raja Rai Singh was regarded as one of the ablest generals of Akbar, and led several campaigns, winning a *mansab* court honour second only to members of the imperial family. It was said of him that 'his saddle is his throne' — a reflection of the fact that this ruler spent much of his life far from the land of his birth, taking part in innumerable military campaigns. The doughty warrior was also a patron of poets, bards and intellectuals. He was himself a scholar of Sanskrit and is also known to have authored two texts. It was in his reign that a new fort of red stone was built in Bikaner. Rai Singh's new fort is, ironically enough, known today as 'Junagarh', meaning 'the Old Fort'!

In the tradition of their ancestors, his brother Prince Prithviraj, popularly known as Peethal, was also a great warrior. In addition to that, Peethal was one of the most renowned poets and scholars of his era. Equally at home on the battlefield and in the council chamber, Peethal is said to have been one of the famous 'nine gems', or *navratnas*, who graced Emperor Akbar's court.

The kingdom of Bikaner continued to prosper over the next few generations. Of course, as is the case with all States, there were periods of internal dissension and rivalry over the throne of Bikaner. Such dark phases, however, were compensated for by the achievements of some exceptional kings, like Karan Singh and Anup Singh, and their relatives.

The Mughal Empire was, by now, the acknowledged central authority over much of India and Bikaner's relations with the Empire remained, by and large, cordial. Every one of the rulers who reigned over Bikaner during the Mughal period (and lived to the age of maturity), saw active service in the cause of the Mughal Emperor. In fact, there was hardly any major Imperial campaign, whether in northern India or in the Deccan, in which the Bikaner rulers had not personally led the Bikaner troops into battle.

Such military exploits were not confined only to the rulers, though. The proud warrior blood that ran in the veins of the other Bikaneris — princes and common soldiers alike — led them to seek glory on the field of battle with equal zest. The rulers and their brethren also held important posts as viceroys, governors and imperial representatives for tricky diplomatic negotiations during the reign of different Mughal Emperors. Apart from the Bikaner rulers themselves, the younger sons of the house, like Prince Peethal and Prince Padam Singh, etc. were also held in high esteem at the Mughal court.

The heroism and exploits of Raja Karan Singh of Bikaner and his four sons, Padam Singh, Kesri Singh, Anup Singh and Mohan Singh, became part of folklore during the reign of Aurangzeb, the last great Mughal Emperor. The Emperor himself constantly acknowledged and rewarded their gallantry at court.

In spite of that, Aurangzeb had a rather troubled relationship with Bikaner. In part, this was caused by court politics and in part due to Aurangzeb's increasing religious single-mindedness On one famous occasion, the Imperial forces were encamped at Attock, in the far north-west (now part of Pakistan), when the accompanying Hindu rulers learnt of a rumoured plot by Aurangzeb to forcibly convert them all to Islam

These rulers conferred together and it was agreed, Maharaja Ganga Singh's *Golden Jubilee Volume* informs us, that the Imperial Mughal force be "...induced to cross first, and when the boats returned to fetch the Hindu contingents, they should be destroyed. ...Just as the fleet containing the Muslim troops had crossed the river, news arrived that the mother of the ruler of Amber (Jaipur) had died; and on this pretext all the Rajas delayed their crossing for twelve days. They had now the river between themselves and the Imperial Army, but it still remained to destroy the means by which the Imperial forces could return to set upon them Accordingly, they asked for the boats to be sent back, saying they intended to cross".

"The Rajas then came in a body to Raja Karan Singhji of Bikaner. They pointed out that since his territories were the least susceptible to invasion, he could, without risking its ruin, save their religion and bear the brunt of the Imperial displeasure by destroying the boats Raja Karan Singhji assented, but not without a condition, which was that he should be seated on an improvised *gaddi* in the forest, for once to receive the homage of the assembled Rulers as 'Emperor of Hindustan' To this

condition the Rajput Chiefs agreed. A throne was speedily constructed and all the Princes saluted the Ruler of Bikaner with the cry: 'Jai Jangaldhar Badshah' — 'Victory to the King of Jangal'. The Bikaneris thereupon set to work to destroy the boats in the presence of the Imperial messenger; the other Rajas helped in the work of destruction; and the Rajput forces set off securely on their way home".

It seems Emperor Aurangzeb was furious at the Raja's action. However, despite his wrath, a sense of fairness compelled him to invest Bikaner with the title of *'Jangalpat Badshah'*, with the remark that the Bikaner ruler had already been so recognised by his fellow princes! (The words 'Jai Jangaldhar Badshah' would henceforth remain the motto of the House of Bikaner, and when Queen Victoria granted a coat-of-arms to the ruler of Bikaner in 1877, the words were emblazoned on that as well)

Karan Singh's heir, Anup Singh (1669-1698), was the first ruler of Bikaner to be invested with the title of Maharaja. In fact, in recognition of the impressive services rendered by Anup Singh and his famous brothers, the Emperor Aurangzeb conferred the highest honour of the Mughal court — *Mahi Maratib*, on the Bikaner ruler.

Himself an accomplished Sanskrit scholar, mathematician and an astronomer, Anup Singh was a patron of art, music and learning. Anup Singh encouraged the composition of many treatises and poetic and musical works at his Bikaner court. He was also responsible for collecting and preserving at Bikaner many valuable Sanskrit manuscripts, originating from different parts of India.

The death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 AD was followed by the gradual collapse of the grand Mughal Empire, as powerful governors and ambitious princes flung off the yoke of the decaying empire. The anarchy of the times also affected Bikaner. Palace intrigues, squabbles over the crown, occasional minority rules with regency governments, attacks by marauding armies, and disaffection among local nobles became the main features of the century that followed.

In these turbulent times, the reign of Maharaja Gaj Singh (1745-1788) stands out. Renowned amongst his contemporary fellow-rulers, Gaj Singh received the hereditary titles of 'Sri Raj Rajeshwar Maharajadhiraj Maharaja Shiromani' (together with the grant of the *pargana* of Hissar) from the Mughal Emperor, Mohammed Shah, in recognition of his valiant services. These were titles which would descend to Karni

Singh, Bikaner's 23rd ruler, over two hundred years later.

The same period witnessed the rise to prominence of another power in India — the British East India Company. In 1818, harried by refractory nobles and external threats, Maharaja Surat Singh of Bikaner (1788-1828), despatched an emissary to the British. His mission was to negotiate a bond of friendship between Bikaner and the East India Company. In a document containing eleven articles, both sides pledged "...perpetual friendship, alliance and a unity of interests". Once ratified by the British Governor-General, Lord Hastings, the treaty assured Bikaner of British protection, and, in accordance with the provisions of the treaty, British troops entered Bikaner to assist Maharaja Surat Singh in quelling the insurrection of his defiant nobles.

This pact of 1818 was to mark yet another historical turning point in the saga of the desert citadel of Bikaner. While on the one hand it assured external and internal peace to Bikaner, it also bound the kingdom to aid the British during their times of need. As a consequence, among other things, Maharaja Sardar Singh of Bikaner personally led a strong force to the help of the British during the momentous days of 1857. In gratitude, Bikaner was presented with forty-one villages by the British.

In the meantime, the years of internal problems as well as financial and military liabilities towards the British as per the treaty, had proved an enormous burden on the treasury of Bikaner. In May 1872, when Sardar Singh died childless, to be succeeded by a great-nephew, Dungar Singh, then a few months short of his 18th birthday, the treasury was in debt. Furthermore, not only were there no schools, roads or hospitals, there was also lack of proper administration A large untrained army, maintained for the sake of tradition, was a huge burden on the kingdom's revenues, and the ruler's hold over his nobles was tenuous.

The transition to modern Bikaner was initiated by the young Maharaja Dungar Singh. The State of Bikaner was divided into regular districts, with sub-divisions, under the charge of trained officers. The old land revenue system was abolished, to be replaced by a fixed assessment to be paid to the State directly. Regular courts of law were organised and laws based on British Indian models were adopted A new police force was raised to check lawlessness and dacoity, and hospitals, dispensaries and State schools providing free education were opened.

In 1886 Dungar Singh became the first ruler of an Indian state to install electric power in the capital city. The momentous switching on of lights was watched by nobles and awe-struck commoners alike, and the event rapidly became the talk of the land within a very short time.

By the time Maharaja Dungar Singh died on August 19, 1887, he had successfully laid the cornerstone for a new Bikaner. During the 15 years of his reign, the revenues of the state had more than trebled; the treasury's debt wiped off; and many important reforms initiated. The foundations for a modern Bikaner had been laid.

It was left to Ganga Singh, the seven year old brother who succeeded Dungar Singh as Maharaja of Bikaner, to build upon the foundations bequeathed by his brother and to lead Bikaner into the 20th century.

Maharaja Ganga Singh was one of the most outstanding men of his generation. A sagacious statesman, an astute politician and a gifted administrator, Maharaja Ganga Singh was to transform Bikaner into one of the premier modern States of the Indian subcontinent.

In the course of his long reign spanning the years 1887 to 1943, the Maharaja was to leave his mark on many spheres of life, both internationally and nationally He not only represented the Indian Princes at the Imperial War Cabinet and Conference, but also was a signatory to the Peace Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I on behalf of India. Maharaja Ganga Singh was also a prominent member of the Chamber of Princes.

Invited to attend the two Round Table conferences in Britain in 1930 and 1931, he also participated in many other important deliberations concerning eventual self-government for India. His military career was no less splendid, and he led his troops to China during the Boxer rebellion of 1900, fought in France and Egypt during World War I, and later went to the Middle Eastern war front during World War II.

Maharaja Ganga Singh worked constantly for the betterment of Bikaner. Through his efforts the ancient city of Bikaner became the centre of a well-run modern administration. State institutions and small industries were started, the judicial system was overhauled, and Bikaner became the first state in northern India to establish a Chief Court, which was later upgraded to a High Court. By 1913, a Legislative Assembly (originally styled as 'Representative Assembly') had also been inaugurated in Bikaner.

It was in this rapidly changing Bikaner that Maharaja Ganga Singh's first grandson, Prince Karni Singh, was born. He was the inheritor of an awe-inspiring legacy.

Two

THE BHANWAR SAHEB OF BIKANER



THE BIRTH OF THE NEW PRINCE WAS ANNOUNCED TO THE PEOPLE OF Bikaner by the beating of traditional *thalis* and drums. Public holidays were declared and offerings made by the ruling family and others at different temples during the remainder of that happy month of April 1924. Alms were given to the needy, sweets distributed and the poor fed. Besides this, one hundred prisoners (both men and women) were released and the sentences of many others partially remitted or reduced.

Along with all this, hosting celebratory banquets and 'At Homes' became the order of the day for the aristocracy. Many princes and others were invited to Bikaner to join in the heady celebrations, and on May 1, 1924, a grand formal durbar was held by Maharaja Ganga Singh in the Durbar Hall of the old fort to mark the birth of the new royal baby.

The child was the Bhanwar Saheb of Bikaner — the first-born son of the kingdom's crown-prince. This eldest grandson of His Highness Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner GSCI, GCIE, GCVO, GCE, KCB, ADC, LLD, was also the first grandson to be born to a ruling monarch of Bikaner in nearly a hundred years.

For, though Maharaja Ganga Singh was a direct descendent of the

founder of the kingdom, Rao Bika, the crown had passed, on occasion, to brothers, nephews and even grand-nephews. Ganga Singh himself had been a minor when he had succeeded his older brother, who in turn had succeeded a childless great-uncle as Maharaja.

The celebrations over the birth of Bhanwar Saheb Karni Singh were, therefore, to go down in the history of Bikaner. In later years Karni Singh would hear about the countless telegrams to other Indian ruling houses, the King-Emperor, the Viceroy, and other friends and well-wishers that flew out of Bikaner at his birth and the congratulatory messages that poured back in.

He would also hear about the donation of a sum of Rupees 10,000 to temples and charities made by his overjoyed grandfather, and of how the Rao of Rajasar, Lt. Col. Rajvi Gulab Singh, had been boisterously tossed into the swimming pool of Lallgarh Palace on that joyous day of April 21, 1924.

Prince Karni Singh's father, Maharaj-Kumar Sadul Singh, was the heir apparent of Bikaner. He was the elder son of Maharaja Ganga Singh and his Maharani 'Ranawatji', a princess from Pratapgarh-Dewaliya, belonging to the Ranawat clan of Rajputs A daughter of the ruler of Pratapgarh, His Highness Maharawat Raghunath Singh, the Princess had married Maharaja Ganga Singh on July 7, 1897. Prince Karni Singh, however, would never know his grandmother as she had died in 1906, many, many, years before his birth.

Born on September 7, 1902, Prince Sadul Singh's education and upbringing had been geared towards making him an able future Maharaja. With this in mind, Maharaja Ganga Singh had educated his son at Bikaner. His tutors had included Indian scholars as well as British guardians like Mr. Hanson and Mr. Dixon. As the Maharaj-Kumar became older, he was placed with various ministers and senior officers to get practical administrative training and upon his eighteenth birthday Sadul Singh had been invested with the powers of Chief Minister of Bikaner, by Maharaja Ganga Singh at a formal durbar. This was a post he was to hold for the next four and a half years. A crack-shot and an excellent rider, the Maharaj-Kumar was a keen sportsman who skated and played polo, tennis and squash with equal proficiency

Karni Singh's mother, the Yuvrani (crown-princess) Sudarshan Kumari was a princess from Rewa, an important kingdom located in central India, in what today constitutes the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Ruled by Rajputs of the Baghela clan, Rewa had known a long and impressive history over the centuries. Born on September 5th, 1906 at Rewa, Princess Sudarshan Kumari was the daughter of His Highness Maharaja Venkatraman Singh of Rewa. Her parents having died during her childhood, the young princess had been brought up under the guardianship of her brother, His Highness Maharaja Sir Gulab Singh of Rewa

As was the norm for most Rajput princesses at the time, Sudarshan Kumari had been tutored privately. She knew Hindi, English, Sanskrit and Urdu, and was well versed in religious scriptures, especially the Gita and Upanishads Rewa was renowned for its rich cultural heritage, including its litterateurs like Vishvanath Singh Ju Dev and Raghuraj Singh Ju Dev, among others, who wrote in Hindi, and it was to this, as much as her own inclinations that the Princess owed her life-long interest in art, music and literature.

These were interests she was to pass on to her children. Sudarshan Kumari brought her Rewa inheritance into play at Bikaner. Here she composed and compiled *'Doha'* and *'Soratha'* couplets and poetry in profusion — perhaps the first Maharani of Bikaner to do so. Deeply interested in philosophy and religion, she was also to write in later years about her spiritual beliefs.

It was on April 18, 1922 that the heir apparent to the throne of Bikaner, Maharaj-Kumar Sadul Singh, married Princess Sudarshan Kumari at a glittering ceremony in Rewa. The wedding was an occasion for much splendour and celebrations, both at Bikaner and Rewa, with royalty from different parts of India participating. The princess from Rewa would, henceforth, devote her services to Bikaner and its people for the subsequent half a century, first as the Yuvrani, then as Maharani and later as the Rajmata (Queen Mother) of Bikaner. She was to prove a strong influence on Karni Singh's life as would the young prince's father and grandfather

However, the strongest influence on the little Prince during his formative years came from his grandfather. By the time Bhanwar Karni Singh was born his paternal grandfather, Maharaja Ganga Singh, had attained an international stature and gained universal recognition as one of the foremost Indian rulers. A visionary in a patriarchal mode, who lived and breathed for his land and his people, Ganga Singh had already raised his own children in a manner befitting the onerous duties expected

of them as Rajput princes and princesses. Now Maharaja Ganga Singh took charge of the upbringing of the next generation.

"It was customary for the head of the family, who in this case was my grandfather, to assume the responsibility of the younger generation," Maharaja Karni Singh recalled in an audio-cassette recording years later. "My father really had very little to say in the matter."

Karni Singh's sister, Princess Sushila Kumari, was exactly a year older to him. The brother and sister were to become very close companions, as would their younger brother, Prince Amar Singh. Born on December 25, 1925, Amar Singh was only 20 months younger than his brother. However, as Karni Singh confessed in a recording later, Amar Singh "...was always to remain my kid brother!"

In that era it was the norm for the children of Indian royalty to be brought up in the charge of English nannies and tutors, with the boys later sent to select schools like Mayo College at Ajmer, or Rajkumar College at Rajkot. Ganga Singh himself had been privately tutored by Indian and English scholars and later attended Mayo College.

For the upbringing of his grandchildren, however, the Maharaja had very definite views. He wanted them to be equally familiar with both their local traditions and with the English life style. He, therefore, decided on a judicious mix of Indian and English tutors and guardians, so that the young princes and their sister could learn the best aspects of both cultures and bodies of knowledge.

First came the carefully chosen nursery staff. Later would follow a number of teachers and guardians, with a fairly full daily time-table calculated to give the children the best of education, etiquette and 'princely' training. With this in mind, Mrs. Ethel May Dent, an Englishwoman, was invited from England to be nanny to the royal children She was a sensible and caring woman who saw to it that her charges were brought up with the right mixture of discipline and affection

Having come to Bikaner just before the birth of the Bhanwar Saheb Karni Singh, whom she called 'Bo-Sab', Nanny Dent took excellent care of all her charges when they were infants. As they became older, she also took on the task of their initial education, while Ramjeevan was charged with teaching the children about local ceremonials and traditional social niceties.

Court duties and protocol did not enable the Maharaj-Kumar and Yuvrani to spend too much time with their small children, and Nanny

Dent (sometimes called Nanna affectionately) became as close as a mother to her charges in their earliest years. "All of us loved her with all our hearts", acknowledges Karni Singh's elder sister Princess Sushila Kumari (the Maharani and now the Rajmata of Udaipur). Her youngest brother, Amar Singh (whom Nanny called 'Bunny' because she said he was always hopping about) concurs, "Nanny loved and looked after us just like a mother. She meant everything to us when we were little."

A secret fear that the young Karni Singh shared with his sister and brother concerned Nanny's departure. As he recorded on a cassette in 1977, many years later, "...one of the biggest fears in our minds was that if Mrs Dent ever left us when we grew up, how would we bear the shock of parting? And I remember that in my younger days, I began to associate music with this parting, and for years I did not like to listen to any music!"

Fortunately for all concerned, Mrs. Dent stayed on with the Bikaner family long after her charges had grown-up and married and had children of their own When she finally retired in her old age and went back to England, she remained in touch with her erstwhile charges and on her death they had a cenotaph erected in her memory in England.

Infancy was as idyllic as could possibly be for the young prince. The early years were less regimented; for the strict training towards becoming a good prince would start a little later. The children were loved and cosseted and provided with all manners of toys. "Of course, we sometimes squabbled and had tiffs like all children do, but these were never serious," acknowledges Karni Singh's 'kid brother', Amar Singh.

The family was already living in the new Lallgarh Palace that Maharaja Ganga Singh had built. Designed by Sir Swinton Jacob in the Indo-Saracenic style, Lallgarh Palace possessed four exquisitely carved main wings made from red stone around an inner courtyard. These were known as Lakshmi Niwas, Sadul Niwas, Karni Niwas and Shiv Bilas. The first, Lakshmi Niwas built in 1902 was used by the Maharaja, while the second Sadul Niwas built for the heir apparent Prince Sadul Singh in 1912, was used by the heir apparent and his family. The remaining two wings, Karni Niwas and Shiv Bilas, were built in 1924-26. Over time, Karni Singh was to be allotted rooms in all the four different wings at different periods of his life.

The palace grounds contained tennis courts as well as beautiful gardens, where the children played. Karni Singh's grandfather and father

were both fond of gardens and they ensured that Bikaner, despite being situated in the middle of a desert, had beautiful public and private gardens on par with Delhi and other parts of Rajasthan, cared for by dedicated experts. The prince thus grew up amidst the heady scent of seasonal garden flowers and the lush green of the Lallgarh Palace lawns. The specially planted jackaranda, gulmohar and other trees added further touches of green and, when in flower, vivid splashes of colour.

In addition to the three children of his elder son, Maharaja Ganga Singh had also taken charge of the upbringing of the three daughters of his younger son, Maharaj-Kumar Bijey Singh. These were the princesses Jai Kumari, Lakshmi Kumari and Dev Kumari. The six children would spend hours playing games and listening to stories together.

Toys were available in plenty for the young princes and princesses. "There was never any shortage of toys," remembered Karni Singh during a cassette recording, "because grandfather was very very liberal and gave us endless amounts of toys. There were six of us children. ...We always played together and were treated alike When grandfather bought toys for us he had to buy six identical toys to keep everybody happy!"

Once, around 1930 Maharaj-Kumar Bijey Singh returned from England with tricycles for all six children, besides other games and toys. The tricycles were highly appreciated, and obviously well made as they subsequently outlasted handling by the next two generations of Bikaner royal children!

The day-apartment initially provided for the exclusive use of his small grandchildren by Maharaja Ganga Singh was Room Number 2, on the ground floor of the Lakshmi Niwas wing of Lallgarh Palace. Their early education was also carried out here. At night the little Prince Karni Singh and his sister and brother would retire upstairs to their mother's apartments in the Sadul Niwas wing of the palace. In their earliest years, the three children were put to bed in a kind of dormitory system in a large room, under the charge of Mrs. Dent, where one sepoy remained on guard all night long, but as they grew beyond infancy this changed.

Later, when they were older and had acquired the disciplinarian Thakur Gop Singh of Malasar as their guardian, the two boys would be given a suite of four rooms in the Karni Niwas part of the palace near the swimming pool. Their sister used to join in all the day's activities of her two brothers during this phase, though she lived and slept upstairs with their mother. It was only around 1936, when Karni Singh was about

12 years old that the two Bhanwar Sahebs were to be shifted to a new suite of apartments in yet another section of the Lallgarh Palace.

Fifty years later Karni Singh would recall the move to these new rooms around the time of his twelfth birthday when his brother, Prince Amar Singh, was recovering from typhoid. Situated on the first floor of Shiv Bilas, these apartment suites had been specially designed and furnished for the two princes by their fond grandfather, and for the rest of his life Karni Singh was to occupy the same rooms (with minimal changes) whenever he was in residence at Bikaner.

Momentous changes were taking place in the world beyond the confines of the nursery. One such change was the opening of the Gang Canal in 1927. The canal was to transform a vast tract of arid northern Bikaner into the granary of not only Bikaner State, but also of northern India. Famous by the name of Ganganagar today and renowned for its agricultural produce, it requires a lot of imagination to visualise the sandstorms and aridity for which the area had been once dreaded!

When Maharaja Ganga Singh had assumed full powers in 1898 AD, the kingdom of Bikaner had been facing yet another of the famines for which the Thar desert was notorious. This was the *Chapna-akal* — or 'the famine of the year *Chapna*' (i.e. *Vikram Samvat* 1956 of the Indian calendar), which would go down in history as the Great Famine.

The eighteen year old Maharaja had personally supervised the famine relief operations, travelling extensively from village to village on camel-back throughout his domain, and organising the supply of grain and fodder for livestock to the far-flung corners of his kingdom, in conditions where roads were non-existent and movement over sandy wastes slow and difficult. For this he had earned adulation from his people and the 'Kaisar-i-Hind' award from the Queen Empress of Britain.

After this experience, appalled by the hardships imposed on his people by recurring famine, Maharaja Ganga Singh realised that if Bikaner was to combat the famine conditions, which affected the area every few years, access to water through some kind of a canal system was essential. In addition to this, the young Maharaja felt that the establishment of an efficient network of railways to enable rapid movement of food and other items was equally vital. Both became goals that were to obsess the Maharaja and that he would strive towards and achieve within his lifetime.

The railways came first. In 1898 the total mileage of the Bikaner State

Railway was only 85.15 miles. With the keen backing of the young Maharaja, however, 883 miles of railroad tracks were systematically laid out in a relatively short span of time. Soon the Bikaner State Railway (which separated from the Jodhpur-Bikaner Railway in 1924 — the year Prince Karni Singh was born), had expanded to connect all the important centres within Bikaner State as well as with outside world. It soon rose to become one of the biggest sources of revenue for the state. In fact, at the time of integration with India, Bikaner possessed nearly 1000 miles of railway track network.

The dream of providing water for his thirsty kingdom through a canal took longer to realise. One reason for this was the plain and simple fact of Bikaner lacking a perennial river-system! Plans were drawn up, therefore, for channelising waters from the snow-fed Sutlej river of northern India.

For almost twenty years Maharaja Ganga Singh pursued his dream. At first, the authorities in British India, whose sanction had to be obtained, were unmoved by the Maharaja's scheme, but finally by 1912 a definite scheme was formulated.

However, since Bikaner did not have riparian rights, the Council of the kingdom of Bahawalpur, its western neighbour, vehemently opposed Bikaner being given any share of the Sutlej waters. They held that the diversion of so much water to Bikaner would ruin Bahawalpur's own irrigation schemes. Maharaja Ganga Singh was not to be deterred, however, and after further years of paper-work and negotiations, he saw success in part with the signing of an agreement of lasting significance between the Punjab, Bahawalpur and Bikaner

There still remained the problem of financing such a large venture, however. The Maharaja appealed to Bikaneri merchants and traders settled within and outside the State, established the State Bank of Bikaner, and raised short-term loans. Within a short time the necessary monies had been raised and in 1921 the work of cutting the canal began. Finally Bikaner's dream of obtaining water from the Sutlej river, through a man-made concrete-lined canal, to irrigate around one thousand square miles of parched desert land in northern Bikaner was taking shape.

Appropriately enough, the canal would be known, after the Maharaja who had striven so hard for it for so many years, as the Gang Canal.

The canal was built to carry twenty-seven hundred cubic feet of water per second into the desert. It was the longest lined canal in the world

at that time, being over 90 miles from the headworks at Ferozepore in Punjab to its destination near the tiny Bikaneri habitation (then called Ramnagar with a population of 1500), that would become famous as the city of Ganganagar.

The Gang Canal was completed and formally inaugurated on October 26, 1927, at the Shivpur headworks, some 15 miles north of Ganganagar city, by the Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin, in the presence of Ganga Singh and other Princes and dignitaries. Amongst those looking on that day was the three and a half year old Prince Karni Singh.

Earlier that day, he had not known why he was at the newly constructed Circuit House at Ganganagar, rather than at home, but he was quite content to play with his wooden toy bricks, specially his favourite blue block, here as at Lallgarh Palace. Now he stood besides the tented awnings of the *Zenan-khana* pavilion, provided for the ladies of the royal family, on the edges of the Gang Canal at Shivpur headworks and watched with awe as the surging waters from a far-distant Himalayan snow-fed river roared into the Gang Canal for the first time.

"I remember very vividly," he was to record many decades later, "looking through the curtain to see the waters gushing into Bikaner... as the canal was opened by the Viceroy, Lord Irwin. This is certainly one of my earliest memories".

The tiny Prince could not have then imagined how significant the canal and its waters were to be not only for Bikaner and her people, but also for his own future work as a Member of Parliament years later. Appropriately enough, the opening of the Gang Canal in 1927 remained one of Prince Karni Singh's strongest childhood memories.

Meanwhile, in common with most children, little Karni Singh remained largely oblivious to most of the changes that were taking place in the world beyond Bikaner during the late 1920's and early 1930's. As a result, the significant role his grandfather was playing both in the world of international diplomacy, and on the national political situation of India, did not intrude too forcefully on the life of the little prince for the next few years.

For instance, Maharaja Ganga Singh's participation in the two Round Table Conferences in London in 1930 and 1931 was of great significance. To his tiny grandson, however, it was grandfather's return to Bikaner, along with the toys he carried, that was always an occasion of note.

"I remember when we had gone to meet grandfather after his return

from England," Karni Singh recorded on tape. "This was probably in 1930 or thereabouts, after the First Round Table Conference." The children were taken to Gajner, the famous hunting preserve that was such a favourite with the Maharaja. Here the children found all manners of toys and gifts laid out on tables, and each child was invited to select their own choice articles out of this impressive display.

Besides toys, Karni Singh remembers that, "I selected a purple blanket, which I still have, and a red coloured rug with a lot of tassels hanging on it, which also I still have." These remained in his possession for the rest of his life. Yet another selection he made was of about 75 coloured handkerchiefs. These fascinated the young prince. "These I used to carefully keep, tied-up in one handkerchief, and used to count them every few days. I've lost track of these, but they were beautiful articles," he recalled in later life.

During these early years, as would be the case later too, Maharaja Ganga Singh often played host at Bikaner to many important personages, both Indian as well as European These included not only British Viceroys and senior administrators and officers, but also members of foreign and Indian ruling families. In fact, in 1921, only a few years before the birth of Karni Singh, the then Prince of Wales had visited Bikaner, just as had an earlier Prince of Wales with his Princess in 1905, at the beginning of the 20th century.

One such visit, that of the Viceroy Lord Irwin, when Prince Karni Singh was five years old, was to remain vividly imprinted on his memory. To the little Bhanwar Saheb of Bikaner the Viceroy was a very tall man indeed. "I remember his standing in front of Lakshmi Niwas courtyard [of Lallgarh Palace] and his asking how old I was, and I put up my hand to stretch out my four fingers and thumb outspread to show that I was five years old," he recalled.

It was not only royalty or British officials who came to visit Bikaner. Among other distinguished visitors to Bikaner was the famous Indian scholar and nationalist leader Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, and on his visits young Karni Singh would be asked to touch the feet of the Pandit in the Indian manner and seek his blessings.

During this childhood period, there was much to occupy the children. In addition to a certain amount of studies, there were games and sports and riding, visits of various dignitaries, the thrill of innumerable festivals, holidays at Mt. Abu and Bombay, and the splendour of court func-

tions, parades, ceremonial processions and *durbars.*

One of the highpoints in the calendar for the Bikaner royal children used to be the annual Christmas party. Held in the Ante Room of Karni Niwas, this celebration was always eagerly looked forward to by them. There was always a huge beautifully decorated Christmas tree, and toys and presents for all the children of the guests and nobility, as well as for the Bikaner royal children.

The little princes and princesses would wait with bated breath for the appearance of Santa Claus to hand out presents. "Santa Claus always arrived spectacularly — not on a sleigh drawn by reindeer — but riding on an elephant," recalls Karni Singh's sister (now the Rajmata of Udaipur)!

Every year a long list of all the children would be prepared well in advance by the Master of the Household, and upon Santa's arrival the present-giving would begin, as the name of each child would be called out and he or she would go up to Santa and receive a gift. "Every single child attending the party got a present," remembers Amar Singh. After this all the children tucked into a lavish Christmas spread and enjoyed the party.

Later in the evening, each of the Maharaja's grandchildren would be sent an old-fashioned metal tub filled to the brim with toys appropriate for their respective ages and special interests, which was just the right thing to round off a wonderful Christmas day!

Every so often, Karni Singh, Sushila Kumari and Amar Singh would go out for a ride in the family's beautiful grey Rolls Royce. The children would pile into the back of this open car, with either Thakur Gop Singh or Thakur Nawal Singh as guardians-cum-escorts in the front seat and their driver, known as Kanji, at the wheel. Kan was famed for his slow driving which unfailingly irritated the children no end.

The normal apparel of the Prince consisted mostly of coloured kurtas and pyjamas during this period of his life. This was also the usual dress for his sister and brother. On extra special ceremonial occasions, or when Maharaja Ganga Singh insisted on all three of his grandchildren standing beside him to review march-pasts, they all wore breeches and a coat. The two little boys had been provided with two sets for such occasions by the Maharaja. One set consisted of a blue blazer with white breeches, and the other was a red blazer coat with fawn coloured breeches set.

As very young children, recorded Karni Singh, the boys disliked these

intensely because of the prickly feeling of the breeches, and often wore their soft pyjamas before putting on the breeches. This was a secret that their grandfather never found out, which was fortunate, or else he would certainly have had much to say about such namby-pamby behaviour!

It was not that the Maharaja was harsh on the grandchildren. On the contrary, he was very fond of all his grandchildren, especially his favourite eldest grandson, Karni Singh. He was, however, very concerned that his grandchildren grew up to be wise, disciplined, compassionate, able and efficient princes and princesses, so that they could work for the improvement of their State and subjects.

This was as important, in the Maharajas's eyes, for the boys as it was for the girls, for the latter also would become Maharanis and Ranis of some other territory at a future date. With this in mind, Maharaja Ganga Singh desired that all of his grandchildren should be educated and brought up in a disciplined manner as befitted their station in life.

The observance of purdah and segregation of women was customary among Rajput royalty and aristocracy at that time, and it was the norm for girls to be brought up separately from their brothers However, Ganga Singh was of the view that girls should be educated and learn horse-riding and shooting in the same way as boys

The Maharaja had doted on both his daughters, the short-lived Princess Chand Kanwar (1900-1915) and Princess Shiv Kumari (born in 1916), who was to be the future Maharani of Kotah, (now spelt as Kota) The elder had been a great favourite of her father's. Maharaja Ganga Singh had been at the battle-front in France in January 1915, when news arrived that Chand Kanwar was seriously ill with tuberculosis. The Maharaja immediately sought permission to return to India to be with his beloved child. (Briefly joining his Bikaner troops in Egypt, enroute, and taking an active role in the battle at Ismailia).

The Princess was sent to Bhowali Sanatorium, in the hills near Nainital, for treatment and convalescence. Sadly, Chand Kanwar never returned to Bikaner, dying at Bhowali later that summer of 1915. The family was devastated. There still exists a card with an extract from Longfellow's *The Reaper of the Flowers* in Maharaja Ganga Singh's handwriting — mute witness to a loving father's emotions. For Prince Sadul Singh too, the loss of his older sister so soon after the demise of their mother, was a double-blow at a formative stage of his life. Subsequently, a cenotaph was erected at Bhowali in memory of the young

Princess and the Bikaner Gift Cottage, to be used in later years for sick war-returned officers, was bestowed to the sanatorium.

The Maharaja had showered as much affection on his younger daughter, Princess Shiv Kumari. When it came to the turn of the next generation, the Maharaja was equally fond of his granddaughters. Consequently, he ensured that Princess Sushila Kumari was educated and brought up with her brothers and learnt to ride and tent-peg, and shoot, and do her lessons with the two boys. The princess became an excellent shot, a superb rider and tent-pegged well too. "I even learnt to tie a *safa* (turban) very early, much before either of my brothers were able to," she recalls The three children were often called upon to stand besides Maharaja Ganga Singh wearing riding clothes and boots, with *safas* on their heads.

A timetable was drawn up for the children, with the day divided into strict compartments, and this was rigidly adhered to. Every day, barring Sundays, the children would go for horse riding in the morning. The timings for this were pre-arranged. Recalling those days in later years, Maharaja Karni Singh was to note that, "...we children had to be dressed and ready to mount up at around 5 o'clock in the morning throughout summer and around 8 o'clock in winter. Even a two minute delay was considered an offense."

During the day there were classes, and in the evenings there were more sports, either football in the garden, or rounders or cricket, or skating or tennis. There were no lessons on Sundays. When they were older, the children were taught to shoot as well.

Included in this daily schedule were set times for the children's visits to their parents and grandparents in the mornings and evenings. Twice a day, with unfailing regularity, the children would be taken to meet their grandfather and 'grandmother' (Maharaj-Kumar Sadul Singh's stepmother).

The timetable was, of course, modified over the years as the children grew up. One of the early ones, dated September 19, 1935 — when Karni Singh was nearly eleven and a half years old, and bearing the signature of Thakur Jeoraj Singh can be summarised as follows.

Rising at 5.30 in the morning, the children went riding from 6.15 to 7.15, returning to bathe and change, before visiting their grandfather at 7.45 am on the dot. At 8 sharp they went upstairs to call on the Maharani and then their mother, coming back downstairs forty-five minutes later.

Breakfast was served to them at 9 am. This was followed by lessons in Arithmetic, English language and literature, or other subjects, from 10 in the morning until 12.30 pm with Mr. English, the Prince's tutor. Then followed a two hour spell of rest. At 2.30 pm the children drank milk and by 2.45 they were back at work, doing more lessons till 4.30 pm. This time the teacher usually would be Pandit Dashrath Sharma, who taught them Hindi, History, Geography and other subjects.

At a quarter-to-six in the evening it would be time for their evening visit to their grandfather, the Maharaja. Afterwards the children played games or went for a drive, returning in time for an evening meal which was served at 7.15 pm. After dinner the children made their evening call on the "Family Upstairs", returning in time to be put to bed at 8.45 pm by the clock. This timetable applied to all three children.

Another timetable, dating to August 8, 1939, almost four years later, and meant only for the two Bhanwar Sahebs, was equally detailed. The boys were woken at 5.15 in the morning, and after an hour of riding they would return for a refreshing swim, to be followed by a visit to their grandfather at 8.45. However, by this time, the twice-daily visits upstairs had been limited to an evening visit only. Instead, after breakfast, the two Princes would settle down to lessons, at which their sister Princess Sushila Kumari would join them, till 1 pm. After lunch and a short rest-period, the three would return to their lessons till 5 30 in the evening. At 6.15 both the Princes would pay their daily call of fifteen minutes on their father, the heir-apparent of Bikaner. After this they were free to play games etc. from 6.30 to 8 pm, returning to spruce up for their one hour visit upstairs, where they also dined. By 9.15 pm the boys were expected to be downstairs again, and could read etc. till 10 pm, which was their stipulated bed-time.

The Maharaja greeted his grandchildren each time by kissing them on their forehead. The grandchildren, in their turn, were specially instructed not to do *khamagani;* the traditional obeisance to show respect by folding the hands together in greeting and touching the feet of an elder (an elder, moreover, who was also the monarch). They would simply enter and walk up to their grandfather and receive his benedictory kiss. Similarly, leave-taking was shorn of all formality, and the grandchildren were taught to simply say 'Ta-ta, Dada', and exit. This mode of farewell was perhaps illustrative of the British influence on the Maharaja.

The grandchildren were also taught to address their grandparents by

the terms 'Dada' and 'Dadi', meaning (paternal) grandfather and grandmother, without any traditional honorific as a suffix, instead of the more usual, if formal, 'Dado-Sa' and 'Dadi-Sa' still in vogue in Rajasthan. In terms of manners and court etiquette, this was almost the equivalent of using the 'Tu' form of the French language rather than the more polite, formal, 'Vous' form!

While the Maharaja observed minimal formality with the grandchildren and loved them all wholeheartedly, he was, undoubtedly, extra partial towards his eldest grandson, whom he affectionately called his 'Soldier Boy'. As an infant, little Karni found his grandfather to be a particularly awe-inspiring figure. Gradually, however, a very real camaraderie developed between the two This was to be a life-long special bond for both.

Karni Singh was an extremely affectionate child His aunt, Princess Shiv Kumari (now the Rajmata of Kota), recalls that when the little boy called on the "family upstairs" he would invariably rush up and give her a bear-hug. Given the formality and timetables and guardians surrounding the tiny prince, this was perhaps the child's way of expressing his naturally gentle and loving nature, and his desire to spend more time with his family-members

The time the children spent with their parents was extremely limited Each day they could spend only a certain amount of time with their mother and a very little time with their father, as per the daily schedule. In fact, Maharaj-Kumar Sadul Singh and his wife had very little say in the upbringing of their own children; this role having been taken over by Maharaja Ganga Singh. "For all intents and purposes," Karni Singh was to record on tape, "grandfather was our mother and father and grandfather, all rolled into one!" It was only when Karni Singh took to shooting and tennis as a teenager, that he was able to spend more time with his father.

An extremely hardworking ruler, Maharaja Ganga Singh held the dream of building Bikaner into a great state, and in the eyes of his grandchildren, he apparently worked ceaselessly! During their twice-a-day visits the children always found the Maharaja working at his office table. Often Karni Singh would be sent in as an emissary to request that grandfather play cricket with them. The standard reply would be, 'I have no time for cricket just now. I have to earn my pay.'

As the children were only too well aware, their grandfather was the

Maharaja and could not possibly be in need of earning a livelihood. Years earlier, in 1902, Maharaja Ganga Singh had set aside a fixed Privy Purse for his personal needs. From that time onwards, all his personal expenditure, including private visits, shooting tours, and the cost of all personal establishment etc. was meant to be charged to the Privy Purse.

Over time this separation between the two departments of 'Palace' (or personal) and 'State' became even more clearly demarcated, with even the cars carrying the letters 'P' for 'Privy Purse' or 'S' for 'State' to show where their maintenance and petrol expenses came from. The Maharaja was scrupulous about State and Privy Purse expenses being kept separate, ensuring that all his (and his family's) personal needs were taken care of by the latter. Not just that, he used his Privy Purse not only for erecting his palaces and private buildings, but also gave away substantial donations out of it towards charitable and religious causes — including to religions other than his own.

That a man in his position should be so conscious of his public and civic duty, therefore, left an indelible impression on all the youngsters Years later, when a Member of Parliament, Karni Singh was to repeat his grandfather's words "...over and over and over again in public, emphasising on the people that earning your living does not necessarily mean in terms of money only, but rather that you have to satisfy your conscience that the money you get has been earned by effort and not simply taken as a matter of birth-right." Not just that, in 1952, soon after Karni Singh was elected to Parliament, he had a silver seal made with one day's salary, which bore the words "One day's honest income."

Maharaja Ganga Singh was not always immune to the entreaties of his grandchildren, however. On one memorable occasion the Bikaner family was at Mt. Abu, where they always spent much of the summer annually. Mt Abu — Rajputana's 'hill-station' — was the summer capital/retreat for the British Resident/AGG, where several rulers from different States spent a part of the season.

Maharaja Ganga Singh was, as ever, busy with his administrative work, when young Karni went up to him with the request that he join the children in a game of cricket. In spite of his pre-occupation with work, the doting grandfather agreed and walked out for a few, precious minutes to play cricket with the youngsters.

Maharaja Ganga Singh paid considerable personal attention to the development of the grandchildren too. He was, for instance, very keen

that the boys develop a certain kind of handwriting, with a slant to the right. This was, he informed the young princes, a manly script which they should practice diligently and adopt, as he totally disapproved of anyone writing straight upright letters. Karni Singh followed his advice and moulded his calligraphy along the lines suggested, but his younger brother, Prince Amar Singh continued to write with an upward slant. In the view of his big brother, Amar Singh was, perhaps, more obstinate about changing on orders!

When Karni Singh became older Maharaja Ganga Singh made further arrangements for the Bhanwar's education and upbringing. One such arrangement was the appointment of Colonel Thakur Gop Singh of Malasar as guardian to Karni Singh and Amar Singh.

A fiercely loyal man, the Thakur was a stern disciplinarian, and one of the reasons Maharaja Ganga Singh selected him was to ensure that the grandchildren grew up well disciplined to fulfill their future roles. Holding the rank of a colonel in the Bikaner State army, Gop Singh was endowed with vast practical knowledge and immense ability though he had had little formal education. He never pampered or indulged his charges because they were royal, and in the eyes of young Karni Singh, his guardian was one of the toughest men alive.

"He was so tough with us that being spanked was considered his kindness," recalled Maharaja Karni Singh years afterwards. "He never treated us as princes, and if anything went wrong, short of being slippered we got everything." Karni Singh's sister, who is now the Rajmata of Udaipur, remembers clearly how "sometimes, when we felt Gop Singhji had been particularly strict, we would complain to grandfather about him. Grandfather would smile and say 'I'll speak to him about it' — but he never did." Admits Amar Singh with a chuckle, "We used to call him 'grandfather's agent'! But there is no doubt that he was a good man, acting in good faith".

Karni Singh recorded on an audio-cassette how, "On one occasion we were five minutes late for horse-riding. It happened to be a winter morning, and in winter at 8 o'clock sharp we were on our horse except Sundays. The dressing-down that I got for being late I shall never forget! ...In fact, Gop Singhji was so tough that on one occasion, when we had gone to meet our mother and were ten minutes late, we got a tremendous dressing-down. He said that he was not interested in any human feelings. He had his orders from grandfather that our time for meeting our mother

was such-and-such, and therefore at the expiry of that period he expected us down."

Gop Singh was firmly of the view that since it was his job to teach them punctuality and a host of other things, he had to perform that role properly. Though Gop Singh did not accord corporal punishment to his charges very often, when anything went wrong the children would receive a severe reprimanding. On such occasions, recollected a middle-aged Karni Singh years later on a cassette-tape, "...we used to pray that Gop Singhji would drop dead!"

However, as the children grew older, they realised that their tough guardian was actually a caring, loyal man, who was doing his best to prepare the young princes and their sister for the realities of life "I remember that after my 18th birthday, I revered and respected him, and was grateful that I had a guardian like Gop Singhji, and it was a result of his great care and tough upbringing which served us in the later years to come, when life became really rough and tough."

In addition to guardians like Thakur Gop Singh of Malasar and, prior to him, Thakur Nawal Singh of Magrasar, various Indian and English teachers were also appointed from time to time. Around Bhanwar Karni Singh's tenth birthday, the Maharaja secured the services of Pandit Dasharath Sharma to teach the children Hindi and Sanskrit. (Dasharath Sharma was to later obtain a doctorate in history and gain renown as one of the leading contemporary historians of Rajasthan).

Pandit Dashrath Sharma proved a strong influence on Karni Singh Years later, Maharaja Dr. Karni Singh of Bikaner, MP, would frequently reiterate his debt to the teacher who had been able to encourage and inspire his royal student towards the attainment of higher education and formal degrees.

However, that did not prevent a much younger Prince Karni from groaning under the weight of the scholarly demands made by the Pandit during his childhood. Once on a particularly hot day, the children were standing near the elevator, waiting for the old teacher to come to their apartment, and grumbling aloud, saying if only Dashrathji was dead we wouldn't have to study today! Unfortunately for them, the Pandit was within earshot and overhead them. He became justifiably upset and needed a lot of pacification from his now contrite and concerned royal students before the matter was forgotten!

In the summer of 1934, around the same time as Panditji came to

Bikaner, Maharaja Ganga Singh engaged Mr. B.A. English as tutor and English teacher to the princes. English had studied at Cambridge. He was well versed in the public school education system of England and had previously been Principal of the Udai Pratap College in Benares for five years He had also been tutor and guardian to the princes of Bhopal, sons of the late General Nawab Mohammad Obaidullah Khan of Bhopal, as well as to Prince Pratap Singhji Rao Gaekwad, the heir apparent of Baroda. Mr. English was to teach the Bikaner children for nearly five years, until March 1, 1939. Concurrently, he was entrusted with the charge of the Walter Nobles' High School at Bikaner and other duties, including as Supervisor of the Dungar College, Bikaner. He also served Bikaner as the kingdom's Director of Education.

An important part of growing up was learning how to be a 'good' prince. Maharaja Ganga Singh, with his strong sense of duty and royal obligations, held very definite views about teaching his grandson not merely good governance, but how to be a just and caring future ruler.

Thus, from early childhood Prince Karni Singh began to be taught how to perform ceremonial duties and so forth. Along with this came skills considered essential and desirable in a prince or a princess These included horseriding, shikar and sports. For riding, the famous polo player Sayani Bakhtawar Singh was chosen to be the riding instructor of the Maharaja's grandchildren. Military training, as befitted a Rajput prince, and attachments with different administrative departments would follow when the prince was older.

During this growing-up phase, Karni Singh often accompanied his uncle, Maharaj Kumar Bijey Singh, on various shooting expeditions in the vicinity of Bikaner. Uncle Bijey was an enthusiastic sportsman who, in the view of his little nephews, shot everything in sight!

One favourite spot was the Durbari Lake, a pocket of water about an hour's drive beyond Gajner. Here the party would fire away with great zeal through many a lazy afternoon On other occasions, the group would pile into open top cars and drive out into the desert scrub countryside, and Karni Singh was always impressed at Uncle Bijey's ability in shooting down every bird that flew over the car!

Unfortunately, Karni Singh was not to know this debonair handsome uncle as an adult, for Maharaj Kumar Bijey Singh shot himself on February 11, 1932 leaving behind his wife, Jaisalmeriji Manohar Kanwar, and three very young daughters. He died young, having been born on

March 28, 1909. The Maharaja was very fond of his younger son, and Prince Bijey Singh had often accompanied his father on the latter's travels to meetings and conferences within India and abroad. He had been in the Bikaner party that had gone with Maharaja Ganga Singh to the League of Nations, the Imperial Conference and the First Round Table Conference.

The death of Bijey Singh was a blow to the entire family. It also affected another branch of the Rathores. For, in 1872 and 1887 respectively, both of Lall Singh's sons had been adopted into the ruling family of Bikaner. These were the Maharajas Dungar Singh and Ganga Singh. As a result, there had remained no other male heir in the family-line of Maharaj Lall Singh to continue that branch of the lineage. Bijey Singh had, therefore, been 'adopted' into the family of his paternal grandfather, Maharaj Lall Singh, by his paternal grandmother.

Later on, Maharaja Ganga Singh established the Prince Bijey Memorial Hospital for the public of Bikaner in the memory of Prince Bijey, which was formally opened by Maharana Bhupal Singh of Udaipur in 1937.

Meanwhile, around the time Prince Karni Singh became thirteen, his father, Maharaj Kumar Sadul\Singh, presented him with a hand-made 32 calibre Holland and Holland shotgun and introduced him to the sport of clay pigeon shooting and to serious shikar. It was with this gun that Karni Singh was taught to shoot clay pigeon at Mt. Abu by his father.

Until then, Karni Singh's shooting had been confined to air-rifles, and even earlier to pop-guns, with which the children aimed at flies on window-panes with pop-gun corks. The latter required, in its own way, a certain knack as Karni Singh recalled on a cassette-tape over fifty years later; "We used to go close, say approximately six inches from the fly ...Anything further than that would be more than the length of the string [to which the cork was attached], so the cork would not reach; but at close distance we decimated the fly population of Abu in no time!"

One such toy gun had been acquired in Mt. Abu when Karni, then about seven years old, was lying in bed with measles. The gift (of a pop-gun) had been his mother's way of keeping him quiet, and the Prince was extremely proud of his weapon, even though the gun merely made a noise. Karni Singh asked his mother for a second gun, specifying to her in great detail that he wanted a chromium-plated air-gun, with proper sights and a hexagonal barrel! He was also insistent that the gun

be a double-barrel! Unfortunately for Karni Singh, when Suganiya, one of his mother's servants, was sent to 'Balucha', the sole shop from where such a purchase could be made in Mt. Abu, all he could find there was another pop-gun exactly like the one the child had already got.

A little later, the children found a novel way to shoot when Karni Singh substituted the cork on the same sort of pop-gun for an improvised version of 'ammunition' all his own. He took to using empty rifle cartridges, which would be reversed and 'loaded' into the cylinder barrel of the pop-guns, where they fitted in remarkably well. When fired, the empty cartridge would quite often fly out some five to ten feet.

Luckily for all concerned, no mishaps occurred with these 'designer' weapons! For, as the 'innovator' himself accepted in a recording made decades later, even using empty shells, this kind of childish shooting could have proved extremely dangerous.

The Prince was about ten years old when the proper air-guns — the 'Dianas' and others — came into his hands. Because of the danger involved, the children were not permitted to use pellets initially. Not to be daunted, however, the children improvised yet again, using lentils of the *moth* and *moong* variety which fitted perfectly into a 177 calibre. These lentils, driven by the velocity of the air-guns, could be shot with remarkable accuracy - an observation shared by many other generations of young Indian children allowed air-guns minus the pellets.

The first to suffer from this was the population of flies in the boys' room. Soon, though, the children graduated to aiming and scoring hits at the 'flycatchers' or lizards on the ceilings and walls "Every night," Karni Singh reminisced years later, "there would be fly-catchers on the walls, trying to catch insects, and, one by one, I would decimate them all. Then one day I went out shopping and in Mr. Balucha's shop I managed to find myself a pistol type air-rifle. It had a long barrel, but where the right-hand pistol grip was, that's where the gun ended. With this gun I had many pleasurable hours of shooting."

The first time the Bhanwar took this pistol type air-gun out it had rained a lot. "I was out," he recalled, "and suddenly saw this huge bull frog and shot him in the head. The bull frog became a great trophy."

Coins soon became a favourite target for the young prince. As a younger child, prior to gaining access to air-guns, there had been a stage when Karni Singh loved to throw up coins in the air and shoot them down with a catapult. This catapult (*gulel*), bought in Mt. Abu by the Bhanwar,

gave him hours of fun. "I used it for years," he noted. "In fact, I became so proficient with it that I could actually shoot a coin up, say, twenty times out of thirty times"

"I later on graduated to an air-rifle and started shooting the coins up in the air. And as if that wasn't enough, I started throwing air rifle pellets up in the air, trying to shoot the pellet. I remember that one time I averaged one in five shots, and then I couldn't hold it any longer and informed grandfather of my shooting prowess. And he said, that next you'll be telling me that you are shooting flies on the wing! And that is where the matter ended."

The acquisition of the new hand-made 32 calibre Holland and Holland shotgun at the age of thirteen opened the doors for a different level of shooting for Prince Karni Singh. His father, the Maharaj Kumar, was rated as one of the world's best shots, and had shot wild game in several different parts of India. He had even been on a safari to Africa twice. Learning from him was a great experience for Karni Singh. Sadul Singh firmly believed that all young shooters needed to start with light recoiling guns, because any gun that caused excessive recoil would start a flinch — or, as the British called it, a 'jib' — which was absolutely wrong for any aspiring marksman. At Mt. Abu, a clay pigeon range was arranged near the tennis court. Here targets were thrown above the trees in singles and pairs while Karni Singh learned to shoot them down in flight. The routine was followed almost every evening, and the Bhanwar found it a very exhilarating experience. In later years, Karni Singh the Olympian shooter would look back to this period of his life and acknowledge that this was perhaps the time when he learnt to handle a gun comfortably, and shooting became part of his life.

Shooting practice continued at Bikaner too, where Karni and brother Amar honed their skills on flying targets. At that time, there was a huge tower for throwing overhead targets located at Shiv Vilas, near the present-day rifle ranges, on which Maharaja Ganga Singh had ordered machines to be mounted. Whenever practice was needed, a man would climb the tower and release the targets.

Shikar was another important aspect of Rajput life, and the princes enjoyed going out for shikar shoots too. Karni Singh, however, felt mixed emotions the day he bagged his first brace of three partridges under the guidance of his ace marksman father. In his own words, "The surprising thing was that though I was excited about shooting, when I shot my first

three partridges I felt so bad I could not eat my dinner."

The main reason for this feeling, perhaps, was the fact that his mother was a strict vegetarian, who did not herself shoot, and was generally opposed to the taking of life. As a result of her influence, her children too had a preference for vegetarian food. In contrast, like many Rajput men and women of that period, both Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh and Maharaja Ganga Singh, enjoyed shikar and eating meat.

As a consequence, for the next few years young Karni was constantly plagued by conflicting emotions as he sought to reconcile his love for marksmanship with his squeamishness at the taking of life and preference for vegetarianism. Between the strong individual influences of his parents, Karni Singh grew up to be a keen shooter and an equally committed vegetarian!

Several decades afterwards, in the late 1970's, Karni Singh recorded on tape how in his younger days he had "...tried to kill a wounded bird once or twice with my hands, and thereafter gave it up, and today I cannot stand the idea of killing a wounded bird with my hands. If I go out shooting someone else has to do the job!" In later years, it was perhaps inevitable, that the sport of clay pigeon shooting appealed so strongly to him. This kind of competitive shooting enabled Karni Singh to sharpen his skills in shooting, without any accompanying guilt at having robbed a living creature of life.

In fact, given that the diet Karni Singh and his sister and brother had been offered throughout their childhood included both normal Indian and English food, all three had a strong preference for vegetarian food This was inspite of the occasional encouragement from Nanny Dent to eat meat just like the average Rajput did. Matters came to a head though, one day while they were in Bombay. Amar Singh and Karni Singh, calling on their grandfather, were asked how things went with them, and whether they were eating enough meat? At this point, young Prince Amar blurted out a horror-stricken exclamation, saying, "Meat? *Hai-hai-hai!*"

Maharaja Ganga Singh could not believe his ears. Angrily he told the boys that they were Rajputs and not the children of Brahmins, so what was this exclamation of *'hai-hai'* all about? Not just that, he also gave immediate orders that if his grandsons did not eat meat, arrangements could be made to pack them off to the famous public school at Ajmer, Mayo College, straight away.

Both boys promptly burst into tears at the idea of being sent to Mayo

College and promised to eat meat as directed. In later years Karni Singh could never figure out just why the idea of going to boarding school was so dreadful for them, but at that time it seemed that the world would have ended if they had been forced to go to Ajmer! At any rate, they started to eat meat.

The elderly Major-General Thakur Hari Singh, Rao of Sattasar, was asked to supervise the children's meals and see that they ate meat. He would watch them in astonishment as they pecked miserably at the meat dishes. Frequently he would remonstrate in their local language, Marwari, amazed that the children didn't enjoy eating meat and showed no inclination for handling the bones properly, as any true-blooded Rajput ought to!

The children hated eating meat, but fortunately for them, their father came to the rescue. For Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh the preference his children showed for vegetarian food was not a major issue, but since it mattered so much to his father, and since the Maharaja's command could not be taken lightly, Sadul Singh would sit with the children and show them how to take a little portion of meat and add a dash of chutney or a portion of yoghurt to mask the original meaty flavour.

Not surprisingly, all three children gave up eating meat completely as soon as they were able to do so.

The vegetarianism of the children may have been reinforced by an incident which had occurred when Prince Karni Singh was about five or six years old. The family had gone to the Bhaironji temple at Kodamdesar. The temple here is linked with Rao Bika, the founder of the kingdom, and it is here that the *jharula* (traditional first tonsure or cutting of hair) of every infant of the royal family is ceremonially performed.

When the children learned that a goat sacrifice was going to take place they asked permission to see it. As Maharaja Karni Singh was to recall it later, "...in those days watching a sacrifice was one of the done things, and you were not a Rajput if you hadn't seen one!"

The permission having been granted, early the next morning, Prince Karni, Princess Sushila and Prince Amar were lined up and waiting when the sacrificial goat was brought into the temple courtyard. As the sacrificial sword gleamed in the morning sunlight, the children eagerly awaited the unfolding of the sacred drama. However, when the actual sacrifice was carried out it shocked the children. The two older ones

made a hasty exit, palefaced and shaken, while little Prince Amar Singh stood his ground. When taken to task later by his senior siblings, the little boy miserably explained that he had wanted to prove he was a 'real Rajput'!

Whether it was this childhood incident that was responsible, or the influence of their vegetarian mother, or a combination of the two, all the three children opted to become strict vegetarians upon attaining their majority. In later years, slaughtering of birds and animals on any of the properties owned by Karni Singh was strictly forbidden.

Karni Singh had found the experience so traumatic that he refused to view another animal sacrifice for the rest of his life. Years later he openly acknowledged on tape that "...even 45 years later I cannot stand the idea of seeing a sacrifice, either live or on a film, and in fact, have not seen one since I was five or six. And today also I often have nightmares of seeing this happen. The result of this has been that all three of us abhor sacrifices."

Furthermore, when Karni Singh became the Maharaja of Bikaner in 1950, on the demise of Maharaja Sadul Singh, he ordered that all sacrifices should be stopped forthwith in all the temples over which the Bikaner rulers had traditional control. This was a most definite break with Rajput tradition, but Karni Singh believed God would understand!

"To add to my troubles," he recorded, "I couldn't even stand the idea of birds and animals being killed for food in my house, and the killing of birds and animals in any of the properties I own and control is strictly forbidden. It is strange for all this to happen, because I happen to be a keen shooter, and in my younger days have done a tremendous amount of bird and animal shooting. But my character that I inherited from my father and mother is so intertwined that I carry both these impressions, and will probably carry them to my last days."

However, that ban still lay in the future, and as the elder Bhanwar Saheb of Bikaner prepared to step into his teens, he continued to practice his shooting and riding, play games, work at his studies, and learn from the trainings and preparations which his grandfather thought essential for every prince. The year the Prince had his thirteenth birthday was also the year that the State of Bikaner began to gear up for the Golden Jubilee anniversary of the reign of Maharaja Ganga Singh. The year was 1937.

Three

A GOLDEN INTERLUDE



THE YEAR 1937 WAS TO REMAIN INDELIBLY IMPRINTED ON PRINCE KARNI Singh's memory as one long whirl of celebrations and grand ceremonial. The autumn of 1937 marked not only fifty years of Maharaja Ganga Singh's accession to the throne of Bikaner, it also marked half-a-century of change and modernization for the land and its people.

As K.M. Panikkar (then Foreign Minister for the State of Patiala, who was later to serve as a Prime Minister of Bikaner in the 1940's and subsequently as India's representative and Ambassador to China) commented in his biography of Maharaja Ganga Singh:

"One who sees Bikaner today and understands its great position in the Indian Empire requires an effort of imagination to picture what Bikaner was when the Maharaja assumed the reins of government The revenue of the State was a bare £ 130,000 There were neither roads nor railways to speak of. Canal irrigation was unknown The peasantry, dependent on a precarious rainfall, lived under the perpetual menace of famine and scarcity. A second crop was unknown [and] ... there was no modern code of laws or proper system of judicial administration. The people had no voice or interest in the administration. A recalcitrant nobility, unbending in its conservatism, defied the authority of the State The administrative system, such as it existed, was medieval in its

organization.. ."

"The position today shows a remarkable transformation. Acknowledged as one of the premier States of Rajputana, the voice of Bikaner counts not only in Indian States' affairs but in the general politics of India and the Empire. The State itself has been changed beyond recognition . .Nearly 1,000 square miles have been recovered from the grip of the desert and changed into pleasant gardens. The benefits of a peaceful and civilized government, security of person and property, an advanced judicial system where every man's rights are guaranteed and maintained, a strong and efficient service for the maintenance of law and order, an expanding system of education and medical services, have replaced the medieval machinery of government which the Maharaja inherited. The foundations of popular government have been well and truly laid by the institution of the Legislative Assembly and municipal and local boards. A well-knit and efficient system of railways, 800 miles in length, connects every part of the State with the capital... The chiefs and nobles, once so defiant, ...have truly become the pillars of State. The *ryots* and agriculturalists, under the care of a paternal government have not only become prosperous, self-reliant, and contented but have developed a proper pride in belonging to a State which is in the vanguard of progress" (Panikkar 1937:379-80).

Not surprisingly, therefore, both the official as well as the popular celebrations of the Maharaja's Golden Jubilee were on a scale unprecedented before in Bikaner. The jubilee was to become a never-to-be-forgotten memory for everyone who was present. By this time the young Bhanwar Saheb Karni Singh was an avid photographer, and seizing the opportunity, he took numerous photographs of his grandfather's jubilee celebrations. These, in later years, became an important part of his personal photographic collection.

There was a thrill of expectancy in the air among all segments of the population for several months before the actual 50th anniversary of Ganga Singh's accession to the throne, which fell on the 18th of September, 1937. Early in the year, the people of Bikaner had formed a People's Golden Jubilee Committee with the object of organising celebrations. Meanwhile, the State Treasury earmarked some five lakhs of rupees for arranging a series of festivities throughout the State of Bikaner.

At the same time, the People's Committee invited contributions











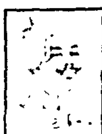








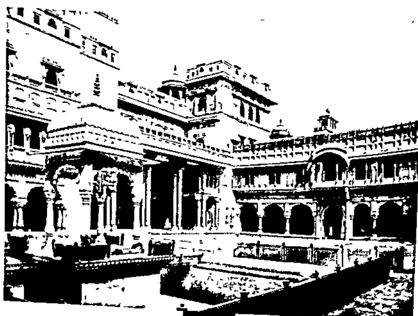



Family Tree



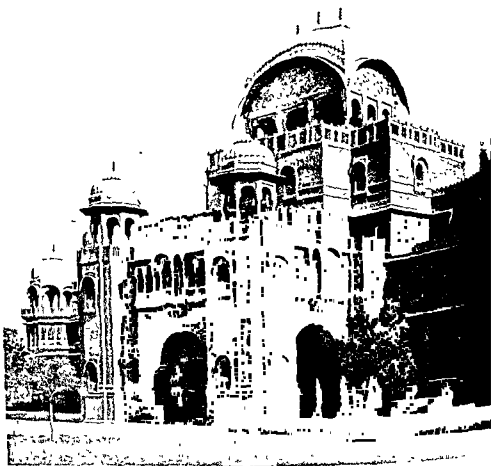
Old Fort Gate



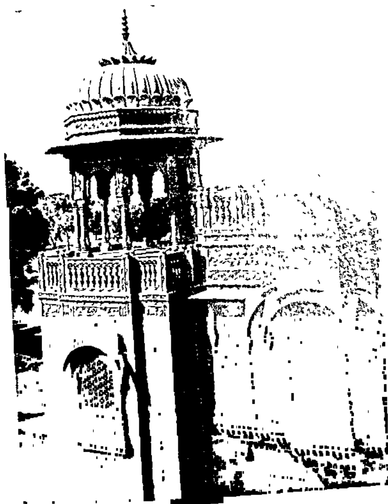
Fort Karan Mahal Courtyard



Ganga Niwas Durbar Hall



LALLGARH PALACE MAIN PORCH



Lallgarh Palace Carvings In Red Sandstone



Maharaja Ganga Singhji at his Golden Jubilee in 1937.



THREE GENERATIONS:
HIS HIGHNESS MAHARAJA GANGA SINGHJI WITH HIS GRANDSON
PRINCE KARNI SINGH STANDING RIGHT: MAHARAJ-KUMAR SADUL SINGHJI,
HEIR-APPARENT OF BIKANER.



Maharaja Ganga Singhji with daughter Princess Chand Kanwar and son Prince Sadul Singh



HIS HIGHNESS MAHARAJA GANGA SINGHJI LEAVING CAIRO STATION FOR INDIA AFTER COMPLETING THE TRIP TO MIDDLE EAST WAR THEATRE, DECEMBER 3RD, 1941. PRINCE KARNI SINGH IS SEEN AT EXTREME RIGHT.



THE LAKE, DUNGAR NIWAS PALACE, GAJNER.

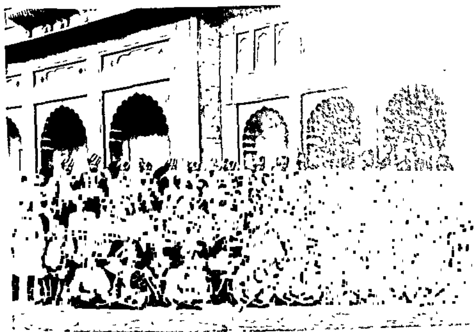




MAHARAJA SADUL SINGH.



THE FAMOUS BIKANER POLO TEAM WITH RAJPUTANA POLO CHALLENGE CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY: (SITTING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) GENERAL H. H. MAHARAJA SRI GANGA SINGHJI BAHADUR OF BIKANER AND LT. COL. THAKUR BAKHTAWAR SINGHJI A.D.C. (STANDING FROM LEFT TO RIGHT).



HIS HIGHNESS MAHARAJA SRI GANGA SINGHJI
AND THE OFFICERS OF THE ARMY.



General Maharaja Sri Ganga Singhji of Bikaner wearing the order & gown of G.C.S.I. (Grand Commander of the Most Exalted order of the Star of India) conferred in 1911.

towards a Golden Jubilee Fund, which they intended to hand over to their Maharaja. In no time at all, money began to pour in towards this Fund. The *Golden Jubilee* volume records that "...there were many touching incidents one of which may be mentioned here. Two brothers belonging to a rich mercantile family ... appeared before the Committee and said: 'This is our Master's Golden Jubilee and we feel we must offer our little tribute in gold.' And in gold it was eventually handed to the Committee" (*Bikaner Golden Jubilee* 1937:65).

The people well knew that Ganga Singh would never use this fund for his personal indulgence, but would on the contrary, utilize it solely for the benefit of the populace at large. This faith was justified. When the fund was eventually handed over to Maharaja Ganga Singh, to do what he liked, he did not use any of the money towards the cost of his jubilee celebrations. Instead, having added to this Golden Jubilee Fund from his personal Privy Purse, the Maharaja used the amount to fund innumerable public benefactions, supported by grants from the State Treasury. Among these was a hospital for tuberculosis patients and a children's ward in the Prince Bijey Singh Memorial Hospital, which it was hoped would serve as the nucleus of a future children's hospital in the capital city.

Meanwhile, as the months whipped by and the summer reached its peak, Karni Singh's excitement mounted. He had already learned that he would attend his first formal *durbar* — the ceremonial 'court', during his grandfather's Golden Jubilee celebrations. There were also a plethora of parades, processions, military tatoos and shoots to look forward to. Then, of course, there would be the break from routine!

There was anxiety among the grown-ups, however. The rains — so essential in a fragile desert eco-system — had failed! Through the long, blisteringly hot days of August, worried eyes scanned the sky constantly Day after day, they hoped and watched and waited, but neither was there any cloud to be seen on the horizon, nor did any drop of rain fall Bikaner well understood the portents. Failure of rain meant famine — *aakal;* a time of suffering. The dreaded sceptre of famine loomed large, and it was feared that the winter months would witness distress rather than gaiety in Bikaner.

As the Maharaja began to make preparations for combatting famine, it seemed as if the festivities would have to be cancelled. At long last, however, almost as if in answer to the prayers of a whole kingdom, the

first drops of rain fell on Bikaneri soil at the beginning of September. In feverish haste, and amidst rejoicing, preparations for the jubilee were quickly resumed.

Just over a fortnight later, on the September 18, 1937, the series of festivities commenced in Bikaner. Spread over ten weeks, these, stated a 'European Visitor', "...out-shone in splendour anything that had been seen in India for generations" (*An Indian Jubilee*, 1939:3). Though young Karni Singh was at that time thirteen and a half and hence too young to have attempted any such comparison, he too realised that the celebrations were, indeed, special and unforgettable!

The population of the capital was more than doubled by the arrival of nearly a hundred thousand visitors, both from the districts of the state and from neighbouring States and provinces, who had come to watch the pageantry and partake in the festivities. All day long they thronged the city in cars, decorated horse carriages and buggies or on foot, very much a part of the tableau that was underway.

The Maharaja's grandchildren were kept well abreast of the news, and much before an opportunity presented itself for them to see the decorations for themselves, they heard about the illuminations and triumphal arches erected all over the capital city of Bikaner. One such arch, built by the army was decorated entirely with rifles, swords, shields and daggers. Two others, put up by the merchant community of Bikaner, carried mottos worked out with gold sovereigns, while the silver.frames were built out of rupees.

One of the leading merchant families had erected an arch covered with panels of solid silver. Different scenes of local activity were depicted in relief on this. There were other arches, representative of the other categories of crafts and trades found throughout Bikaner. Among these, was the much-talked about arch constructed by the jewellers which was covered entirely with ornaments of gold and silver. Not to be outdone, the greengrocers had their own unique contribution, in the form of an arch decorated with the choicest fruits and vegetables — a highly prized commodity for a desert kingdom.

The principal streets and public places were lined with flags and banners in the state colours of saffron and red, the famed *kesar* and *kasoomal* of the Bikaneri Rathores. Many private residences were decorated with streamers, while major monuments were lit up every evening with coloured lights by nearly 60,000 specially installed lamps. "In the

crystal-clear air of the Bikaner nights," the Golden Jubilee volume recorded, "the tracings of the fort, the palaces, the public buildings and monuments made a scene of enchanting beauty. In the public park, fountains were playing against multi-coloured flood-lights; and in the gardens of both the Fort and Lallgarh Palace, the very trees had been transformed into brilliant jewels by thousands of electric lamps of yellow, green, red and deep blue," (*Bikaner Golden Jubilee* 1937:65).

The firing of a salute of 101 guns on the morning of September 18, 1937, heralded the commencement of the Golden Jubilee celebrations in earnest. In accordance with custom, the first stage of celebrations began with religious ceremonies. Both the young Bhanwar Sahebs were excited as they waited for their grandfather to proceed in ceremonial procession on elephant-back, escorted by detachments of the Bikaner Army, from the fort to the temple of Lakshmi Narayanji for a thanksgiving service.

Once again the *Golden Jubilee* volume provides a vivid description "The leading elephant carried the State Flag. It was followed by units of the Bikaner Army, ...all in their magnificent full dress uniforms. Other elephants followed with the State regalia, and after the thirteen musical instruments, the silver palanquins, bullock chariots and led horses had passed, the Maharaja's own party followed on more elephants. First came the heir-apparent on a great tusker, surrounded by other Members of the Reigning family on horseback. Next rode His Highness on a magnificent ten-foot elephant, gorgeously caparisoned in clothes of blue velvet and silver and a variety of jewels and ornaments. The Maharaja himself, seated in the golden howdah, wore a white Durbar coat, a saffron-coloured turban, all his orders, decorations and war medals. He was attended by some of the principal feudal Chiefs of the State. The Maharajah's bodyguard and the Dungar Lancers wound up the procession" (ibid·67).

Every single window, balcony and house-top along the entire route of the procession — a distance of over two miles — was occupied by people eager for a glimpse of the ruler, while the streets were densely lined by an enthusiastic crowd. Raising folded hands in the traditional greeting, they applauded the Maharaja with shouts of "*Khamma*" — translatable in this context as a combination of 'hurrah', 'salutations' and 'long life'! Women sang songs of rejoicing, while roses and other flowers were showered on the ruler and his son from house-tops.

Among the other major ceremonies that marked the jubilee celebra-

tions during September, the most remarkable was the *tuladan*. At this ceremony, Maharaja Ganga Singh was weighed against gold for purposes of charity. The weighing took place on a pair of huge scales set up at the 'Yagyashala', a red sandstone building located in the grounds of Lallgarh Palace.

As Karni Singh and others watched, the Maharaja took his place on one of the scales to the accompaniment of priests chanting Sanskrit hymns, while ingots of pure gold from the state treasury were slowly piled upon the other. The scales balanced when gold to the value of Rs 3,02,912 — then equivalent to about 25,000 pounds, had been heaped up. Then the Maharaja was weighed for a second time against gold and silver; this amount being provided by Ganga Singh from his Privy Purse. Both sums were added to the Jubilee Fund and used for charitable purposes.

In the days that followed, the Bikaner ruler offered worship at a number of temples in various parts of the state. He was often accompanied by his Maharani Ajab Kanwar (respectfully referred to by her patronymic of 'Bhatiyaniji' rather than her given name, as per the Rajput custom), and by other members of his family A series of banquets and feasts, hosted for the officers and ranks of the state's army, some three thousand police and civil employees, and the staff of the palace and the household, followed.

Meanwhile as Karni Singh learnt, thanksgiving services were held by the people of Bikaner ". .of every faith and creed in Hindu temples, Sikh Gurudwaras and Muslim mosques. The European and Indian Christian community attended a service in the beautiful little Church, which the Maharaja presented to them a few years ago" (ibid). Over a hundred prisoners were released at the Jubilee amnesty, while a part-remission was granted to the remaining prisoners Feasts were provided for the poor throughout the state. Popular sports, tournaments and wrestling matches attracted large crowds, as did the display of fireworks on the Maidan in Bikaner, opposite the Victoria Memorial Club. Besides these, a series of open air cinema and dramatic performances were also organised.

As a fitting finale to the first stage of the jubilee celebrations, Maharaja Ganga Singh gave a banquet to some 230 *sadhus* (ascetics). The announcement was then made that Ganga Singh had donated three lakhs of rupees from his Privy Purse towards religious purposes. These in-

cluded the construction of new temples on the bank of the sacred lake at Kolayat in Bikaner State, the fitting of golden gates at the temple at Dwarka — an important pilgrimage centre in western India, the installation of a stained glass window for the Christian Church in the capital, and towards various other important places of worship of the different religions in the State of Bikaner.

There was an interval in the festivities after this, as Maharaja Ganga Singh left for Simla to visit the Viceroy of India. For Karni Singh and the other grandchildren, it was a time to wait with as much patience as they could muster for the return of their grandfather and the resumption of the next stage of jubilee celebrations.

The Maharaja came back to Bikaner in time for the Dussehra festivities. The festival of Dussehra — celebrating the victory of good over evil, commemorates the triumph of Lord Rama, symbol of righteousness, over the demon Ravana. Important among almost all segments of Indian society, it has special significance for the warrior *Kshatriya* caste, to which the Rajputs belong. In addition, since Maharaja Ganga Singh had been born on Dussehra day, which is regarded as the most auspicious day for any Rajput to be born, it had become customary in Bikaner to mark the day with a special *durbar*. Thus, though the Dussehra festival was not part of the jubilee celebrations as such, it became a time for heightened rejoicing during the Golden Jubilee year.

For Prince Karni Singh and his younger brother, the jubilee Dussehra was to mark their first attendance ever at a formal durbar. While they looked forward to this, there was also an element of nervousness, and as the day approached, both the Bhanwar Sahebs privately practiced the traditional manner of offering tribute — *nazar* — to their monarch in the manner hallowed by custom. There would be many eyes on the Maharaja's grandsons at the birthday durbar!

"The day began," the *Golden Jubilee* volume tells us, "with a review of the Bikaner State Army, which is about two thousand strong, and very efficient.. Then followed religious ceremonies and towards midday, the Maharajah held a Birthday Durbar in the old Throne Room of the Fort"

"The room itself is one of the finest in the Fort... A ceiling of rich old lacquer work in purple and gold is supported by a number of gracefully carved pillars, faced with snow-white highly polished plaster of crushed marble. The floor is covered with a beautiful carpet; and in the background stands the golden throne under an imposing canopy Here

the Maharajah took his seat, while a salute of 101 guns was fired outside. Behind the throne sat attendants bearing the insignia of royalty: the golden fan of peacock feathers, the ancestral shield, the gold mace and other relics of past history. All around the pillared hall stood proud men in splendid brocade garments and saffron-coloured turbans On the Maharajah's left were the Members of the Ruling Family; the Heir-Apparent, Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singhji, and his two sons, Prince Karni Singhji and Prince Amar Singhji, who at the ages of 13 and 11 respectively, attended the Dasehra Durbar for the first time. In their new Durbar *Achkans* and adorned with magnificent jewels, the young Princes looked exceedingly handsome" (*Bikaner Golden Jubilee* 1937:69).

Upon announcement by the Court Chamberlain, the men — relatives, chiefs, nobles, army officers, ministers, administrative officials, palace staff, artisans and others — approached the throne one by one in their order of precedence. Bowing thrice by way of traditional obeisance, each solemnly offered *nazar*, in the form of a gold *mohar* coin or in silver rupees, to the Maharaja in cupped hands. As the Maharaja touched each *nazar* in token acceptance, it was handed over to the treasurer, who was standing by with his account book and money bag. Meanwhile, from a courtyard outside, a group of musicians and singers kept up a soft melody. When the last solemn homage was paid, Maharaja Ganga Singh quietly rose, bowed to the throne, and was led out in a stately procession.

The same afternoon, the Maharaja rode in an elephant procession to a sacred tree outside the city for the annual public Dussehra ceremony As was the practice, after religious ceremonies, including a goat-sacrifice, the ruler proceeded to a platform where a life-size portrait of Ravana had been placed Here, in symbolic re-enaction of Rama's ancient victory over Ravana, Maharaja Ganga Singh took up a bow and shot an arrow at the picture, thereby proclaiming afresh to all that evil had once again been vanquished

After the excitement of the Dussehra durbar and religious ceremonies, the Maharaja's grandsons now began counting days till the 26th of October For, more celebrations were around the corner for Bikaner in the shape of the 'State Celebrations' of the Golden Jubilee. This was to include a special Jubilee Durbar.

The weather had cooled down somewhat by the last week of October. This was most welcome to all the distinguished visitors who now began

arriving at Lallgarh Palace at Maharaja Ganga Singh's invitation — some only for a few days, others for longer. Bikaner's chiefs, nobles and *jagirdars* (fief-holders) also arrived at the capital from their desert homes, escorted by their traditional retainers astride camels and horses. Dressed in traditional robes and carrying arms, pennants, drums and musical instruments, they made an extremely striking picture.

For young Prince Karni Singh, it was a fascinating experience to meet and speak, even if briefly, with so many of his grandfather's special guests. Besides the Viceroy and his party who arrived for a six-day visit on November 4, the guests included the Resident for Rajputana, the Chief of the General Staff, the Chief Justice of India, all the Members of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and Maharaja Ganga Singh's former Tutor and Guardian — Sir Brian Egerton, who at the age of 80 had come out specially from England. Several dewans, ministers, political officers and council members from various Indian States were also present, as were personal friends of the Maharaja.

The organisation of the principal events for the state celebrations had been rehearsed to perfection under the gimlet eye of Maharaja Ganga Singh, the decorations and illuminations were ready, over 28 elephants — some loaned for the occasion by other States — were resplendent in their finery, and the gardens were ablaze with flowers. No better setting could have been wished for.

This phase of Golden Jubilee celebrations opened with a fête and a display of sports. The same evening, Maharaja Ganga Singh gave a banquet to the chiefs and nobles of Bikaner. They responded with a banquet in honour of the Maharaja the next day, which took place in a chain of huge tents set up in the gardens of the Fort.

"Only the brush of an artist could produce the charm, the dignity and brilliance of the scene," notes the *Golden Jubilee* volume. "...All the chiefs, nobles, jagirdars and State officials had come in their long *Achkans* of heavy brocade — golden, blue, yellow and crimson. There were slim youths and burly white-bearded elders, rough warriors from the desert and elegant urbane courtiers. Some wore ear-rings of pearls and rubies, necklaces of flat diamonds and large uncut emeralds and slippers of gold and silver. All had with them their family swords, which are cherished as heirlooms and worshipped once every year" (ibid:73).

The next major ceremony that everyone, including Prince Karni Singh, looked forward to was the public Jubilee Durbar. This was fixed

for the morning of October 30, at the fort. The open space in front of the fort became packed with spectators hours before the Maharaja made his ceremonial arrival. Once again, the Durbar Hall of the fort came alive to the splendour of a formal court, as people in brilliantly coloured durbar dresses, resplendent in jewels and, if so entitled, wearing swords, offered homage to their ruler in a time-honoured manner.

"It was medieval Rajputana that faced the spectator in the large hall with its richly carved walls and ceiling", a 'visitor' commented. "But when the ritual was over and the Maharajah rose to address the audience, the modern Ruler came to the forefront. He stated that the Jubilee Fund raised by his subjects would be devoted entirely to public purposes He himself had refused to accept any presents except one, which he hoped would become an heirloom, a Gold Dinner Service presented jointly by the Chiefs and Nobles, the Army and Civil Officers and the leading citizens" (*An Indian Jubilee* 1939.45).

At the conclusion of Ganga Singh's address, his Prime Minister read out a notification listing the 'boons and public benefactions' made by the Maharaja to mark his jubilee year. The Master of the Household then announced the donation of Rs. 3,00,000 from the Maharaja's Privy Purse for "religious and beneficent purposes".

Half an hour after the public durbar ended, a second durbar took place in the new Durbar Hall of Vikram Bilas within the fort. This time there were no speeches, only the solemn dignified procession of feudatories and prominent subjects, offering their *nazar* to the ruler when their turn came.

Both Prince Karni Singh and his younger brother once again played their part here and gave *nazar* to the Maharaja, as they had learned to do, immediately after their father had presented his *nazar*. The Maharaja's grandsons were subsequently described in *The Statesman* which provided a graphic account of the ceremony, as "...two princelings whose unaffected manner was charming in the extreme". The same afternoon, the Maharaja presented new Colours to the troops.

Some days later, on November 4, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow accompanied by Lady Linlithgow and other members of the Viceregal party, arrived in Bikaner on a state visit, and were accorded a ceremonial reception, which included a Guard of Honour. The Viceroy was welcomed at the railway station by the Maharaja and the Maharaj Kumar. Both Karni Singh and Amar Singh were also in attendance, and were

introduced to the Viceroy. Immediately afterwards, a magnificent procession heralded the Viceroy's entry into the crowded streets of the desert city of Bikaner. The procession was over a mile long and included thirty caparisoned elephants, numerous bejewelled horses, camels, bullock-chariots, palanquins, etc., besides ancient pennants and insignia

Later the Viceregal party was accorded another ceremonial welcome upon reaching Lallgarh Palace. This was followed by a series of traditional ceremonies, both at the Lallgarh Palace and the fort. The presence of Karni Singh and his brother, as the grandsons of the Maharaja and the sons of the heir apparent, was required at some of these formal ceremonies At one such function, conducted in the Throne Room at the fort, the Maharaja's grandsons were very much centre-stage, since five golden thrones had been placed for the Viceroy, Maharaja Ganga Singh, Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh, and his sons, and Karni Singh and Amar Singh had to sit through the proceedings with as much dignity as they could muster!

A variety of functions crowded the days that followed. There was a review of the Bikaner Army, another military tournament and torchlight tatoo, a fireworks display, a traditional fire-dance, and performances of Indian music and dance. For this last, in addition to local dancers and musicians, performers had also been summoned from various parts of India. The Viceregal party was also shown around hospitals, schools and public offices in Bikaner. In addition, the Viceroy was called upon the open the Ganga Golden Jubilee Museum, erected by the People's Jubilee Committee. Prince Karni Singh was present at many of these occasions

Then followed a grand State banquet given in honour of the Viceroy at Lallgarh Palace. The *Golden Jubilee* volume details that nearly two hundred guests sat down to dinner in the spacious Durbar Hall at a table laid with plates of pure gold. This formed part of the Dinner Service presented to the Maharaja by his nobles, officers and merchants

To the strains of the military band, which wafted in through the courtyard from the open window, British India's officials and civilians mingled with Rajputs and other prominent citizens of Bikaner As custom decreed, speeches and toasts of good health followed. At the close of his address, the Viceroy announced that by the command of the King-Emperor, the Maharaja of Bikaner had been promoted from the rank of Lieutenant-General to the rank of General on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee. This signal honour formed a fitting finale to the State banquet

and the announcement was greeted by loud applause.

The Viceregal visit concluded with a shooting expedition at Gajner, after which the party left Bikaner for Delhi. Now remained only the penultimate phase of the Jubilee festivities.

First came a banquet given by the Bikaner Government to the Maharaja. Shortly thereafter, towards the end of November, a large number of Ruling Princes arrived in Bikaner. Many were accompanied by their heir apparents and other family members, as well as by nobles, ministers and other attendants. This entailed providing suitable accommodation and making arrangements for over 1,000 persons! Each Prince was accorded a traditional welcome, after which they were offered a busy programme that included military displays, fireworks, musical soirees, banquets, sight-seeing, cinema performances and games.

Karni Singh found it thrilling to find himself in the presence of so many royal guests. They included the rulers of Udaipur, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Kota, Gwalior, Patiala, Cutch, Palanpur, Wankaner, Benares, Bundi, Narsingarh, Pratapgarh, Sitamau, Datia, Danta, Palitana and Khairagarh. Besides the rulers, many States were represented by other members of their respective ruling families. The boys were encouraged to mix with the guests and participate in most of the functions that were arranged.

On November 30, Maharaja Ganga Singh hosted a state banquet for all these princes in the Durbar Hall of Lallgarh Palace. More than two hundred and fifty visiting rulers, princes, nobles and officials attended this special banquet.

Soon afterwards, as the Golden Jubilee year began to draw to a close, all the guests gradually began to leave for their respective homes. By the end of December 1937, Bikaner, the scene of much pageantry and revelry, slowly began to return to its normal activities, and the events of the Golden Jubilee year were relegated to the mists of memory.

Four

PRINCE-IN-TRAINING



AT THE END OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE YEAR, AS THINGS ONCE AGAIN settled back into a pattern of timetables for the Maharaja's grandchildren, they reverted reluctantly to their routine of studies and sports. It was not easy to settle down to 'normal' routine after such a golden spell as they had lived through in the past few months, but it had to be done.

Fortunately, as had been the case before, the routine was adjusted occasionally to accommodate the visit of some special guests to Bikaner, or for other happenings of importance. Furthermore, since Prince Karni Singh was no longer a child, his grandfather deemed that now, more than ever before, the Bhanwar had to be given training that was then considered necessary for a member of a ruling house. Thus, over time, minor changes were made in the routine and life-style of Karni Singh as his grooming towards becoming a future Maharaja became more emphasized.

The coming few years were to see both, Karni Singh's transition to adulthood, as well as changes in the world about him. Among these were the engagement of his sister in 1939, the same year as the outbreak of World War II, followed by her marriage the following year. With that would come the wrench of parting, even though the brother and sister would continue to retain their special bond through the rest of their lives.

1940 was also the year that marked his engagement to his future bride, a princess from Dungarpur. 1941 was to find Karni Singh continuing with his administrative training and his studies, along with a brief spell at the war-front, and the next year would see his 'coming-of-age' celebrations

Through all these changes and transformations, one of the features which remained constant was the Christmas gatherings and the famous Gajner shoots hosted by Maharaja Ganga Singh. Another regular feature remained the annual holidays at Mt. Abu and Bombay, during the long hot months of summer.

As Karni Singh reminisced sometime later on record, "...going to Mt. Abu was a yearly affair. In March or April, as the summer would set in, my father would move to Mt. Abu, and we all went with him. In later years, my grandfather used to call the three of us [Sushila Kumari, Karni Singh and Amar Singh] to Bombay for a fifteen day visit, and then we would go out shopping and have a whale of a time, and grandfather would spend."

"My father used to teach me how to play tennis at Mt. Abu, and shoot clay pigeon, which was a very memorable experience. We played tennis at the Rajputana Club. I remember that the Nawab Saheb of Palanpur [then the *Nawabzada* — son of the ruler], Nawab Iqbal Mohammed Khan Saheb, and I once took the 1st prize in tennis And on another occasion, Baney Singhji [Thakur of Khiyeran] and I took the prize at the [present] Governor's House — it was then called the 'Evening View'.

"It was quite a ritual for the AGG [Agent to the Governor-General] to throw a big party and have the finals of the tennis tournament, and we all used to go there. It was a great social event, with hundreds of Englishmen and their wives, because Abu was a hill-station and was heavily frequented by the wives of [British] Political Agents and officers etc, and we had a very, very, high quality of tennis. There used to be a very famous tennis player, Mr. Handcock, and of course the Palanpur brothers — the Nawab Saheb Palanpur [Nawab Taley Mohammed Khan] and Ata Mohammed Khan Saheb, and their brother-in-law, Sardar Mohammed. All of them were very fine tennis players. Father and I often used to go to play squash at the Club too."

Yet another feature which remained constant, even if some teachers left and others took their place over the years, was the regimen of tutors and guardians and book-learning. In addition to teachers and guardians

like Mr. English, Pt. Dashrath Sharma, Gop Singh and others, sometime after the Golden Jubilee, Maharaja Ganga Singh decided that his eldest grandson needed a companion.

Thus, in June 1938, when Karni Singh was fourteen years old, Captain (later Major) Oswald Leopold Paget was appointed as Comptroller to the princes. The Captain had previously served in the Durham Light Infantry for 21 years. While at Bikaner, Paget's duties extended to playing tennis and cricket with the two princes and accompanying them on riding expeditions. The boys liked his company and were sorry when he eventually left.

Soon thereafter, in the summer of 1939, Mr. Stanley Neville Ure (M.A., M.C.), took the place of Mr. English as Tutor to the two Bhanwar Sahebs of Bikaner. (English having become the Director of Education for Bikaner State by then). Like his predecessor, Mr Ure was also from England. An Oxford man, Ure was an educationist of considerable experience, who had earlier been tutor to the Maharaja of Travancore's brother, who was also the *Elaya Raja* (heir-apparent) of Travancore State in southern India, from 1932-39. Mr. and Mrs. Ure were an elderly couple by the time they came to Bikaner, and endeared themselves to Karni Singh and his siblings. Mrs. Ure even took on the task of teaching them ballroom dancing.

Maharaja Ganga Singh, always particular about the upbringing of his grandchildren, was now concerned about the kind of further book-learning and princely training his grandsons were to receive. From September 1938 onwards, Ganga Singh had given much thought to the matter and, as a consequence, exchanged ideas and written notes with his heir and others.

The Prince was at that time 14 years old, and his tutor, B.A English, described him as being "...mature for his age, and definitely possessing above intelligence... The Prince thinks for himself", he stated in a three page detailed note on 'Suggestions for the Further Education of Prince Karni Singhji' submitted to Maharaja Ganga Singh in October 1938, "and will be all the better for not being spoon-fed. For a long time he has been encouraged to think for himself and to ask questions".

Maharaja Ganga Singh circulated this note and sought comments in particular from his son, his own former tutor Sir Brian Egerton, Bikaner's Prime Minister Sir Kailas Haksar, and Maharaj Mandhata Singh. Over a course of time, each of them put forward their own opin-

ions. Various options about sending Prince Karni Singh to Mayo College, Ajmer, or to the local Walter Nobles' School to complete his schooling, followed by a stint either at a British University or to Bikaner's Dungar College, were thoroughly discussed and argued out with the Maharaja by the group members. Ganga Singh even made his son look up old files pertaining to Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh's own education and administrative training.

Finally, in early 1940 Maharaja Ganga Singh brought out a note about the education of his grandsons, the princes Karni Singh and Amar Singh. [This was the same year as Karni Singh's elder sister, and Maharaja Ganga Singh's eldest grandchild, Princess Sushila Kumari married the heir-apparent of Udaipur (Mewar)].

Bhanwar Karni Singh was then 16 years of age, and the task of preparing him for his eventual role as a probable future ruler of Bikaner was now taken up by Maharaja Ganga Singh in all seriousness.

The four and a half page typed note, dated 30-3-40, bore the heading *'Committee to look after the Education, Training & Upbringing of Prince Karni Singhji Bahadur & Prince Amar Singhji Bahadur'*, and the text ran as follows:

"I have for some time past been seriously considering the question of the education and general bringing up of Prince Karni Singhji Bahadur and Prince Amar Singhji Bahadur. The Princes have now reached an age when their education should be properly regulated and the course of their studies regularly supervised in order that they may have the benefit of a systematic training which would best develop their mental and intellectual faculties and would be in keeping with their position in life.

"Though this is primarily my duty as the Sovereign of the State and the Head of the Dynasty, it is also a responsibility of my Government, as it involves the future well-being of the State and its people.

"This is especially so in the case of Prince Karni Singhji Bahadur who, God willing, will one day have to shoulder his responsibility as the Ruler of this State.

"After full and mature consideration, I have decided, both as Ruler of Bikaner and as the Head of the Family, that it is not desirable for the Princes to be sent to the Mayo College, Ajmer. It is unnecessary for me to go into detail regarding the various weighty reasons which led me to take this decision and which, when I have more leisure, I shall hope to

record in detail in a separate Note.

"In view of this decision of mine, it is necessary that suitable arrangements should be made here for the purpose of regulating the Princes' studies and for the general supervision of their education, &c.

"In order that their studies may be systematical and not haphazard or lop-sided, it is important that, apart from the course of instruction which will be given to them by their Tutors, a regular plan, extending over the next few years, should be worked out with the object of preparing the Princes for their future responsibilities and of shaping their character and conduct in conformity with their positions in life.

"While it is not my desire that the Princes should be stuffed with a great deal of book knowledge to the detriment of their other accomplishments so necessary for a Ruler or a Prince, I am firmly of the view that in the circumstances of today it is necessary for everyone, including Princes, to have a sound education which would discipline and prepare the mind in every direction.

"Further, it is important that the course of studies should also emphasise the true Kshatriya spirit of "*Noblesse oblige*", the responsibilities of Kingship as they have always been understood in India and the mutual obligations of the Ruler, the Nobility and the people

"I would also like to emphasise that, in formulating the course of studies, strict care should be taken to see that proper weight is given to traditions, customs and ceremonial of the Rajputs, and a proper and just balance is maintained between the traditional and the progressive, so that the future Ruler, while rigidly conforming to and retaining what is best in his own traditions and local customs and usage and growing up as a true Rajput and Indian, is not at the same time a blind and hidebound conservative".

The note continued that with the above objects in view, as well as for generally superintending the work of the teachers engaged in educating the Princes, the Maharaja was appointing a committee. This committee consisted of Maharaj Mandhata Singh (who was also its President), Thakur Hari Singh of Sattasar, Major Panikkar, the Thakur of Harasar and Mr. Ure. The Maharaja advised the committee to ".. meet regularly at least once a month and receive reports from the tutors and generally direct the course of the Princes' studies and training etc, subject to whatever instructions I may give them from time to time".

The committee was also ordered to "...formulate rules about the

company which the Princes should keep, the times at which, and the conditions if any under which, they should receive the Chiefs and Nobles, Officials and others." It was also given the general responsibility of "...such matters as the daily routine of the Princes, their food and their domestic staff".

Furthermore, "In due course, the Committee should also consider the question of giving suitable administrative training to the Princes and of making them familiar with the problems of the Government of the Bikaner State."

While conceding that the primary responsibility was of Mr. Ure, as the tutor to the Princes, the Maharaja asked the committee to collectively and individually keep in close touch with both the Princes, and to provide him with regular reports through the committee President, while at the same time obtaining direct instructions on "...all points of importance". A little later, in July 1940, to supplement the teaching of Mr. Ure and Dashrathji, the Maharaja appointed Mr. P.D. Swami as the science tutor of the two Princes

By June 1941, Mr. Ure had left and the Maharaja appointed Major C.G. Handcock as tutor and guardian in his place. He was a bluff army-type whom both the young Bhanwar Sahebs liked. The Major earned a mention from Maharaja Ganga Singh in the latter's speech at Karni Singh's 'coming-of-age' banquet, and was to continue at Bikaner till after 1943. Of course, once Prince Karni Singh turned 18 years of age he no longer required 'guardians' to guide him, as had been the case from his early childhood, but there were still an ample number of 'advisors' to guide his education and training.

Ironically, the old Maharaja was not to know that in less than a decade the kingdom of Bikaner would be merged into the newly independent republic of India. However, the careful tutelage given to his grandson, Bhanwar Karni Singh, would stand the Prince in good stead in the years that followed.

In that era, it was considered essential that a prince acquired both practical abilities in governance and a certain level of book-learning Other aspects regarded as necessary for a prince included knowing horse-riding, polo, tennis, squash racquet, swimming, shooting, and other sports. Besides this, princes learnt etiquette and court duties.

Sports, in particular, were a must on the curriculum of a young prince, as Karni Singh was to say on record in the late 1970's. In his

world. "...There was as much emphasis on sport as there was on education, and the result was that for my father's generation and mine, and in fact, I think my grandfather's generation too, daily sports in the evening was routine. Even today, I am out at 5 o'clock on the sports fields, playing golf, or shooting, or playing tennis etc."

"...In those days, the sport of shooting had aroused considerable interest, and a man's prowess was judged often by the number of tigers or birds he shot in a day. My father was a very great shot and so was my grandfather, and huge bags of imperial sand grouse, a migratory bird that comes to Bikaner, were shot in those days. Of course, today the approach to hunting is altogether different. So much so that we look at a bag of 25 as being too much; but in one year, when King George V, as Prince of Wales, visited Bikaner the bag was 10,000 grouse bagged in two days! Of course, there were 100,000 grouse coming in to drink water — as compared to the 10,000 today, but even then these were astronomical figures! But there were at least two or three hundred people shooting, and therefore one has to look at it from a different point of view."

In addition, social niceties were also regarded as essential. As Karni Singh put it, "...the ability to conduct yourself at dinner parties, on the dance-floor, with a uniform on, all of these were manly pursuits very much appreciated in those days. And when the British Viceroys and A.G.G.s visited Bikaner as we grew up, we were invited to these parties and also participated in the shoots. Apart from enjoying the activities we were gradually brought up to stand on our own feet and hold our own with these people."

"...We were also taught how to mix with people, how to attend parties, how to dance the British ballroom dance, how to talk at a dinner-table, how to use the British style of knives and forks while eating food, how to read French menus, and these, I must say, have proved extremely valuable for those of us who have had the occasion to travel extensively. Another point on which a great deal of emphasis was laid was discipline, respect of elders and punctuality."

Army training was also routine. Maharaja Ganga Singh held very definite views about how a true Rajput male should act and look, and acquiring military training and wearing a uniform was an essential component of this. In keeping with his warrior heritage, Maharaja Ganga Singh had received military training during his boyhood and early youth, first with Bikaneri forces and later with a crack regiment of the Indian

Army at Deoli. In 1900 he was gazetted an honorary major of the British army, and the very next year had sailed to China at the head of the Ganga Risala Camel Corps, previously raised by him, to see action in the 'Boxer Rebellion'. The Bikaner forces had acquitted themselves courageously in China, winning mention in despatches. Shortly afterwards, the Ganga Risala Camel Corps also saw action in the Somaliland campaign in Africa during 1902-1904, just as it was to do in both the World Wars that followed.

When the Great War (World War I) broke out in 1914, Maharaja Ganga Singh had promptly volunteered his services, and seen active service in Flanders and Ismalia in Egypt. By 1917, he was promoted to the rank of a Major-General in the British army, rising to be a Lt.-General in 1930, and the Golden Jubilee year saw him a full General.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the Bikaner Maharaja rated military training as an essential part of a prince's training. Other ruling houses obviously shared this view-point too. And Karni Singh, growing up during the late 1930's and early 1940's, noted that almost every Indian prince had acquired a uniform, either by going through the army in a regular course, or by holding an honorary rank in their State forces.

In his turn, as the Bhanwar Saheb Karni Singh grew older, he and his brother also received their share of military training. Initially came a spell of simple military drills at the hands of *Jamadar* Ridmal Singh of the Sadul Light Infantry during the early half of 1938. Ridmal Singh's instructions were to teach both the Bhanwar Sahebs 'essentials' like marching and how to salute in the proper manner. What followed was a more thorough training at the hands of Shekhawat Berisal Singh, who was a *havaldar* with the Sadul Light Infantry.

Also among the long list of activities common to the adolescence of a prince were attending parades, shoots, durbars and banquets. Banquets at Bikaner were very special occasions. These provided a glimpse of Buckingham Palace etiquette at Bikaner's Lallgarh Palace, since Maharaja Ganga Singh, always a stickler for the proper way to do something, had observed how large banquets and parties were organised by the British during his visits to England. The effect was meticulously recreated by the Maharaja at his desert capital.

Seating arrangements for dinner parties and banquets were looked after by the Master of the Household. Once invitations had been issued and the acceptances came, a table plan would be prepared. The arrange-

ment used to be laid out for the Maharaja to view on a wooden board holding cards bearing the name of each guest and would be finalised only after he had approved the placings. Karni Singh was well conscious that nothing should be done in a haphazard manner. For the banquets and parties thrown by his grandfather and, later, his father, he saw people like Thakur Kishan Singh, Thakur Daulat Singh of Kumbhana, Kanwar Anand Singh and others at work, carefully working out the placing for each guest, keeping in mind protocol and so forth.

As at all western style banquets, it was the custom for the ladies to be escorted to dinner by the gentlemen. The task of handing out little envelopes containing the name of the lady that a gentleman would be escorting to the dining room was reserved for Nana Ratan Marker The whole thing was quite an elaborate affair.

The meal invariably comprised of several courses. The Maharaja had gathered together a group of highly accomplished chefs from different parts of India who specialised in different cuisines. These included some Goanese chefs and also a chef from Kashmir who was an expert in cooking meat dishes.

Besides meat, it was perhaps only to be expected that Imperial Sand Grouse frequently found place on the menu, given the role that the bird played in the social calendar! Brigadier K. Bag Singh (M.B.E.), now in his late 80's and still an Honorary ADC to the President of India, attended several of the banquets during the reigns of both Maharaja Ganga Singh and his successor Maharaja Sadul Singh Son of Thakur Prithi Raj Singh of Daudsar and younger brother of Jaswant Singh of Daudsar (a Prime Minister of Bikaner, member of its Constituent Assembly, and later of the Rajya Sabha), Bag Singh, a career soldier who for a while also commanded the joint forces of the newly constituted Rajasthan after Integration of States, besides serving in the Indian Army, recalls that while other game was often served too, chicken never figured at any of the elaborate brunches, or luncheon and dinner banquets "In those days," he declares, "chicken was just not considered anything special!"

Predictably enough, the menu was in French There was always some hors d'oeuvre, followed by soup or fish. Then would follow an European-style entree course. This used to be removed by the Plats de Bikaner This course consisted of dishes special to Bikaner, served on individual silver platters or thalis holding little silver bowls full of a variety of meats and

curries along with pullao rice and other delicacies. This enabled the guests to get a taste of the famous Bikaner cuisine of which Maharaja Ganga Singh was rightfully very proud. Such dishes, remembers Brigadier Bag Singh, included the Mohan maas or white meat which was a speciality of Bikaner. The meal usually ended with a dessert and coffee. Carefully chosen wines were served with appropriate courses.

"At these banquets," noted Karni Singh years afterwards on record, "the ladies did not retire but stayed till the banquet ended. There would then be speeches, and the raising of a toast to the King-Emperor and a toast to the Maharaja. At the end of the banquet, as the Maharaja and his guests left the dining-hall, Mr. James and the Ganga Risala band used to strike up a special march reserved for such occasions."

In the years prior to the golden jubilee, a complete silver dinner set was utilised, but later Maharaja Ganga Singh acquired a full seventy-five member gold dinner set manufactured by the Bangalore firm A. Barton The set was unique to Bikaner and was used at major banquets. Along with this, the cutlery was also made of gold — or rather of *jod* or gold-plating. The golden plates were the same ones as had been presented to the Maharaja for his Jubilee by the chiefs and nobles of Bikaner and this gift was commemorated by an inscription on a huge silver vase.

Singularly magnificent and elaborate were the banquets hosted on special occasions Karni Singh could never forget the banquets given on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Maharaja Ganga Singh when the Viceroy and several Indian rulers were among the guests. Another splendid banquet marked the marriage of his sister, Princess Sushila Kumari with Prince Bhagwat Singh, the Maharaj Kumar of Udaipur (Mewar), in 1940. Yet another special banquet, which was to remain permanently engrained in his memory, was given on the occasion of his 18th birthday, to mark his 'coming-of-age', for that was when he made his first ever public speech.

Through his growing-up years, Karni Singh attended numerous such banquets at Lallgarh Palace and became familiar with the formalities that the occasions warranted. His younger brother, Amar Singh, vividly recalls how "we were allowed to attend certain of these dinners and banquets from about the age of 10 or so onwards. Even at that age we were trained to do things in the proper manner. Of course, we weren't allowed any of the wines etc. I felt very important escorting a lady into the dining hall, though thinking back, it must have been a funny sight to see a couple of kids escorting grown-up ladies to their seats!"

To ensure that his sons learned to play like true sportsmen and to face defeat with grace. Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh would pit them against much stronger tennis players, to whom the boys would invariably lose. This inculcated in them the notion of 'playing the game' well, and minimised the importance of actual victory or defeat.

In Bikaner, the entire training was geared towards making the princes self-confident, poised, articulate as well as socially aware and responsible individuals. Nearly forty-odd years afterwards, Karni Singh recalled this period of childhood and early youth, admitting that while, "...our upbringing with English nannies and ... guardians like Thakur Nawal Singhji and later Thakur Gop Singhji, and the strict military training we were given as boys was a very valuable training for my brother and me in our childhood, it also deprived us of our normal day-to-day life which people in average homes enjoy. ...But I suppose that was the 'in' thing in the '30s, with all this British influence."

In addition to other trainings, Maharaja Ganga Singh had stressed administrative training for his own elder son when Sadul Singh was a young man. When it came to the turn of the next generation, the Maharaja was equally keen that Karni Singh be given training in administration. Orders were given in 1940, therefore, that the elder Bhanwar Saheb should spend a certain number of hours with the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and others, learning the ropes of administration in a practical manner. The finer details regarding the Prince's administrative training were closely supervised and reviewed from time to time by the Maharaja.

As Maharaja Ganga Singh frequently informed his beloved grandson, he did not put as much faith on paper qualifications as on proper administrative training. The Maharaja had not obtained formal education beyond the 6th standard at Mayo College, Ajmer himself, and was of the opinion that Karni Singh need not waste time in pursuit of formal certificates and degrees, but should concentrate rather on learning about proper governance.

His grandson, on the other hand, felt that in the changing milieu, educational degrees also had their own role to play Years later, he would say that even at that stage the 'sixth sense' that often guided him in taking a particular decision, told him that he would spend the better part of his life in very different times!

With the greatest of difficulties, the Prince obtained permission from

a reluctant grandfather to appear for the Senior Cambridge school-leaving examination. Once Maharaja Ganga Singh had granted his permission, Karni Singh started to prepare, under the tutelage of Pandit Dashrath Sharma, for the Senior Cambridge examination scheduled to be held in the winter of 1941. In spite of all his preparations, however, Karni Singh was unable to take the examinations as planned from St Mary's, Mt. Abu that winter. Just as the examination time came around, the Maharaja started preparations to go on an inspection to the Middle East war front.

In fact, even as war-clouds had gathered over Europe and war appeared imminent, Maharaja Ganga Singh and Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh had individually telegraphed the King-Emperor and the Viceroy of India and offered their services on the battlefield. The offers were promptly repeated by both immediately upon the commencement of World War II, and were to be reiterated constantly. The Maharaja had further volunteered the services of his army units as well. While the personal services of the Bikaner ruler and his heir had not been availed of in the first instance, Bikaneri forces had proceeded to the war-front from August 1940 onwards. (As had been the case before, these troops were to win kudos again in World War II, and in 1947 the Bikaner State was to bring out its comprehensive *'Bikaner and the War 1939-1945'*, detailing the contribution of the Bikaner State's armed forces during those long war years).

Finally, having rebuffed all gentle hints from the War Office about his age — Ganga Singh was then 61, the Bikaner Maharaja's oft-repeated offer of personally proceeding to the war-front was accepted in 1941. To his great excitement, the Bhanwar was invited to join in if he so desired. Karni Singh was seventeen and a half years old. He was also a Rajput. Not surprisingly, therefore, the opportunity to go to war took precedence over staid things like examinations

Throughout his childhood, the Prince had listened to tales of the glorious military tradition, bravery and chivalry of Rajput men and women, and at festivals heard songs extolling a warrior's way. Now, with his short stint of military training he was as eager to go to battle as his aging war-veteran grandfather!

Until this time, apart from the annual visits to Mt Abu and Bombay, the times that Karni Singh had travelled afar outside the borders of Bikaner had been few and far between. Visits to Delhi, for example, as he later recorded, were "...very, very, rare in those days. Grandfather would take me, as a boy, to see the Chamber of Princes, and I remember sitting

in the gallery". Once, "...as a young child, I visited Kota for a tiger-shoot with my grandparents, which was most enjoyable. My grandmother shot two tigers, and I saw His Highness Kota, my Uncle [Maharao Bhim Singh], make a magnificent shot at a tiger across the river from the boat. He bowled her over with one shot!" Consequently, to his exhilaration at the thought of going off to war, was added the thrill of travelling and seeing new lands!

It was on October 29, 1941, that Maharaja Ganga Singh and his older grandson, with Captain Thakur Jagmal Singh as the aide de camp in attendance, boarded the *Felix Roussel,* a French vessel, at Bombay. The next morning the ship carrying the Bikaner party sailed for Aden, under the escort of two vessels, the *Westernland* and the cruiser, *Glasgow.* Upon arrival at Aden on the 4th of November, the Maharaja of Bikaner was received by British military officers and the C-'n'-C of the Ganga Risala, Lt. Col Khem Singh. The Ganga Risala Camel Corps was inspected the same day. While at Aden, Karni Singh had the opportunity to see, among other things, the ancient water-tank said to have been built by King Solomon.

It was also while at Aden that the long-held dream of the Prince to fly in an aeroplane was first realised. At Aden, Maharaja Ganga Singh was the chief guest at an Air Force base lunch In the course of their conversation, Karni Singh asked the officer besides whom he was sitting if it were possible to go up in a plane. The officer promptly called out some instructions and arrangements were made for the prince to be taken up in a Tiger Moth straight away.

Maharaja Ganga Singh was furious, but being unable to say anything in public, had to content himself by glaring his 'Soldier Boy'. Karni Singh thoroughly enjoyed his flight and was thrilled by the stunts the daring RAF pilot performed in the air. They flew over the barracks of the Ganga Risala and thrice the pilot nose-dived. It was truly a memorable experience for the young prince. To the credit of the Maharaja, the matter was never discussed between grandfather and grandson subsequently

From Aden, the Maharaja's group sailed further westward, under the escort of three destroyers. The famed Red Sea, with its abundance of fish, and fleeting glimpses of the African and Arabian coastlines captivated Bhanwar Karni Singh. Passing through the Suez Canal, the Bikaner party eventually arrived at the Egyptian capital, Cairo

Blackouts were a common war-time feature, and one of the vivid

memories that remained with Karni Singh was of the total blackout in Cairo one night, as sirens blared out an air-raid warning. However, the German planes which flew overhead did not drop their bombs on Cairo, but on Fayoin, located some miles from the Egyptian capital. Later the Maharaja and his grandson were taken to inspect the bombed area.

The Bikaner party also visited the Air Headquarters situated on the outskirts of Cairo, much to the excitement of Karni Singh, who was thrilled to see the range and number of aircraft on view.

The Bhanwar, like his grandfather and the rest of the Bikaner group was eager to proceed to the actual battle-front. This ambition was realised on November 29, 1941. The night before, the Maharaja's ADC, Thakur Jagmal Singh had recorded in his diary — "Very excited having heard the news that all shall be proceeding to the actual front tomorrow morning." On the morning of the 29th, the Bikaner party, accompanied by several Allied army officers, assembled at Helipolis aerodrome in the dawn desert chill to board the plane 'Lockhead Budlon'. "Prince Karni Singhji," Jagmal Singh jotted down in his diary, "dressed in serge uniform, sam-brown belt — revolver hanging on left and cartridge pouch."

A flight of one and a half hours brought them to the Bangush aerodrome. After a short halt here, the group continued their journey to an airstrip on the war-front. It was around 9.30 am when the Maharaja's party disembarked here. They were taken to the nearby camouflaged field HQ mess. Soon afterwards, Prince Karni Singh experienced his first thrill of the day at being on the actual battle-front while the Maharaja and his party were still inside the HQ mess. Suddenly a warning was called out as an enemy plane flew into range, and anti-aircraft guns promptly began to spew out shells. However, the intruder was flying too high and safely got away.

Following this minor drama, the Maharaja and his grandson inspected the area. This was followed by a camp-style midday meal. After this, at about 12.30 p.m. they were escorted back to the nearby airstrip where their plane was waiting to fly them back. Just as the group was about to board the plane, further excitement occurred as a German plane began strafing the area. The Allied anti-aircraft guns retaliated, in turn. Meanwhile, Maharaja Ganga Singh and his group were totally exposed on the airfield and one of the shells from the German plane landed at a distance of a bare three feet from their own aircraft.

In the face of this very real danger, the entire Bikaner party retained

its sangfroid and aplomb and Prince Karni Singh chalked up yet another image of the Middle Eastern war-front that would always remain with him. Jagmal Singh's journal recorded the incident vividly, if succinctly "...We are in the aerodrome — up coming a German plane, AA Guns buck-up — good shooting but target too high and fast and got off, great fun. ...Another German plane — Bang Bang. Same difficulty. The shell bursting right over us — one of the big bits with other small ones fall about 3 feet from where all including H.H. [His Highness] and Prince Karni Singhji standing. We had no tin hats — rather dangerous situation."

Following this, a few more days were spent in and around Egypt, and then the Maharaja and his party started back for India. Enroute, there was an unscheduled night-halt at Baghdad while some essential repairs were carried out on the plane carrying the Bikaner group Next morning, December 5, 1941, they flew on from Baghdad to Basrah, where the Sadul Light Infantry of Bikaner was stationed. Here Maharaja Ganga Singh was presented a Guard of Honour by the Sadul Light Infantry, following which he met the officers and soldiers. That night the Maharaja and Prince Karni Singh had dinner with the officers of the Sadul Light Infantry.

On December 6, the Bikaner party arrived at Karachi by aeroplane The welcome party assembled to greet the Maharaja at Karachi airport included, among others, Seth Sivaratan Mohata and a group of mercantile bankers (*seths*) of Bikaneri origin. The Maharaja and his entourage were offered hospitality at 'Mohata Palace'. Two days later, Maharaja Ganga Singh and his group left Karachi for Bikaner by a special train, where an eager crowd gathered to welcome them home again

Though his exposure to the war-front had been, in Prince Karni Singh's opinion, all too brief, he brought back innumerable memories. He was to retain these, as he would memories of meeting, among others, the Allied Commander-in-Chief for the Middle East, Sir Claude Auchinleck, with whom the Bikaner party had dined on November 12 Besides him, Karni Singh also made the acquaintance of Admiral Cunningham, Air Marshal Teddar, and a host of other people in the course of his 'war experience'.

Flying had always enthralled the prince since his childhood. This fascination continued to grow while they were in the Middle East, specially after his plane ride at Aden. In Egypt, the Maharaja and his party had

stopped briefly enroute from Alexandria to Cairo, when a sleek Spitfire went skimming over the tree-tops. Involuntarily, the words, "I wish I could be in that aeroplane," left Karni Singh. His grandfather glared at him and said nothing for the moment, but that night, at dinner in Cairo, Maharaja Ganga Singh soundly rated his grandson, telling him how dangerous aeroplanes were. "I hate aeroplanes," he informed Karni, "you should only think of the Army and not the Air Force."

For Prince Karni Singh, however, flying seemed to be a form of poetry in the air It was something important — something that enticed and mesmerised, and his fascination with flying would remain with him till the end of his days.

For his war-effort, Karni Singh received the 'Order of Vikram Star' of Bikaner, the 'Order of Star of Honour' of Bikaner, the Africa Star, War Medal and the India Service Medal upon his return from the Middle Eastern theatre.

Soon after coming back to Bikaner, Karni Singh asked the Maharaja for permission to appear in the next round of Senior Cambridge examinations scheduled for December 1942. The response to this request was in the negative. Maharaja Ganga Singh was of the strong opinion that his grandson now needed to concentrate more than ever on his administrative training, rather than expend energy on examinations.

In a speech delivered to his Legislative Assembly in 1928, Ganga Singh had outlined "...certain principles of good government which form the hall mark of every State worthy of being ranked as enlightened and progressive, and these...are essential preliminaries — the minima — which can inspire the general confidence of the public both within and without the State and [towards] which any Ruler should aspire who wishes to put his house in order and to bear the fierce light which beats upon the throne". The principles included an independent judiciary, security of life and property, the reign of law — including certainty of law, stability of public services, efficiency and continuity of administration, a well-defined Privy Purse and a clear dividing line between State and personal expenditure, and beneficent rule in the interests of the general well-being of the people.

The Maharaja knew that his grandson understood these principles. He also knew that Karni still required considerable administrative training in order to both provide that "good government" to the people of Bikaner at some future date, as well as to bear "the fierce light which beats upon

a throne". He therefore put his foot down on the subject of Karni Singh expending further time and effort in preparing for things like School Certificate examinations.

The Bhanwar, however, continued with his entreaties, displaying the inclination to "think for himself" which his former tutor had lauded, and promised to do both administrative training and his examinations properly. Seeing his persistence, the Maharaja finally relented and said that as long as it did not interfere with the administrative training, Karni could take the Senior Cambridge examinations privately Subsequently, the Prince worked all day at learning the ropes of administration, and studied his course-books in the evenings, often late into the night, under the guidance of Pandit Dashrath Sharma.

This stress on seeking a grandfather's permission may seem anachronistic in today's circumstances, but in the year 1942 Maharaja Ganga Singh was a reigning Maharaja whose word was law in all Bikaner. In any case, the opinion of every elder carried weight within even the poorest of families.

However, it was not as if the Maharaja and his grandson only had a relationship of formality and court etiquette. The firm ruler and the beloved grandfather were one and the same, and he could be as indulgent on occasion as he could be strict.

Karni Singh remembered being physically disciplined by his grandfather in his childhood, when the Bhanwar Saheb was about six or seven years old. For a misdemeanor he subsequently could not recall, he was taken to Maharaja Ganga Singh's room for a spanking. The child had cried so loudly at that, much to the dismay of his grandfather, that Major (later Lt. Col.) Dr. K.R. Tipnis, the Senior Palace Surgeon, had to carry him all around the corridors of Lakshmi Niwas until he stopped.

Karni Singh never held this against his grandfather, though, because he knew how much the Maharaja loved him and how hard he strove to ensure that his grandson grew up to be a good human being He also knew how worried his grandfather would get when any of them fell ill Once, after Karni recovered from a bout of illness in March 1939, Maharaja Ganga Singh gave cash rewards along with his grateful thanks to Dr. Sivakamu, Dr. Weingarten, and all other doctors, nursing staff and attendants who had looked after his eldest grandson.

In Karni Singh's own words, "My grandfather was a very kind grandfather. There is absolutely no doubt about it! He was a mother, a father

and a grandfather all rolled into one. *Nothing* regarding the grandchildren could be done without his permission and for all intents and purposes, our father counted for very little. ...Father was satisfied that his children were well taken care of, so he never interfered, and my grandfather saw to everything — our education, our clothes, our food, our upbringing, our discipline, our medication and everything. And we can't say that anything was wrong, because the end result has been satisfactory!"

An example of Maharaja Ganga Singh's meticulous care was reflected in his setting up of a Medical Board in July 1940. The Board, consisting of Dr. Weingarten, Bikaner's Principal Medical Officer, and Major Tipnis, Senior Palace Surgeon, was ordered to "...go into questions thoroughly of diet and hours &c. of Princes Karni Singhji and Amar Singhji, lay down definitely what they should have, and submit a brief report to me at an early date". The Board ruled that both boys got adequate exercise and no change was necessary in that regard. However, they found that "Prince Karni Singhji, though bodily quite fit, is definitely overweight; his weight, at present being 13 st. 5 lbs... due to a constitutional factor, certainly hereditary," and recommended two separate food charts for the two Bhanwars.

Maharaja Ganga Singh acted promptly. In a personal letter, dated 6th August 1940, written from 'The Palace Gajner' to his heir, the Maharaja enclosed "...herewith papers relating to the important question of diet and hours &c., for Karni and Amar". At the same time, he informed his "dearest Hiru" (that being Sadul Singh's nickname) that he had already "...given orders that the diet recommended by the Medical Board and the hours &c., should be strictly adhered to", and advised that "Any future changes regarding the diet of the 2 boys should only be made on the advice of the Doctors and not by us laymen".

The letter ended with the Maharaja noting, in obvious reference to the inclusion of tea in the diet-sheets of the boys, that, "Tea is given in all Public Schools in England, and is not only a wholesome beverage but harmless, except of course, as in the case of many other things, when it is taken in excessive quantities".

In his turn, Karni Singh adored his stern, upright and principled disciplinarian of a grandfather. One summer, he contrived a special mosquito-netting for his grandfather's bed. The Maharaja was in the habit of sleeping in a courtyard open to the skies during the summer months, but having long in-grown toe-nails, which would catch in normal mosquito-

netting, he always had problems with mosquito bites. Karni Singh, therefore, designed a contraption that could fit over the Maharaja's bed in such a way that his feet would not touch the net.

The Maharaja's grandchildren knew that any reasonable request — barring wanting to fly — would always get a considered and patient hearing, be it a desire to study further or acquire a new possession. The childhood days when Kanji used drive the grey Rolls Royce at a tortoise pace, were long past. By around 1936-37, the Rolls had lost favour in the eyes of Karni Singh and his sister and brother, who had, instead, developed an interest in Buicks. Maharaja Ganga Singh was, therefore, persuaded to get them a Buick. He acquired an open 1937 model seven seater Buick which his grandchildren used very happily for several years.

When Karni was sixteen, he and his brother convinced Maharaja Ganga Singh to get them a Chevrolet of their very own. This sudden fondness for a Chevrolet car had been triggered off at seeing the 1939 model which Mr. R.H.T. Mackenzie, Chief Engineer (Building & Roads) for Bikaner State, had managed to get for Rs. 3,600 The Maharaja, never against his grandchildren's wishes, sent for a Chevrolet for the boys as they had wanted.

It was a thrilling moment for the young princes when the sparkling maroon car was delivered at Bikaner in 1940 by Sanghi Brothers of Jodhpur. Of course, their grandsire could not refrain from warning the boys to take care of the extremely expensive car — it had cost more than four and a half thousand rupees. He also cautioned them against driving too fast. Of course, the boys did precisely that any way — and consequently got a particularly scathing scolding from him one memorable day after Prince Amar Singh had been spotted driving very fast!

The only time that he was really furious at Karni Singh after the boys had grown up happened around the time the Bhanwar turned eighteen. Karni Singh had, in his own words, grown into a bit of a cheeky know-all at this time, and he once shaved off his moustache. Naturally, such an act could not pass Maharaja Ganga Singh's gimlet eye. Throughout Rajput history, moustaches had enjoyed a macho connotation, and it was not uncommon for a Rajput male to be proud of his moustaches. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Maharaja demanded an explanation from his clean-shaven favourite, adding that the lad was a very naughty *'kupoot'*.

Since the term *'kupoot'* literally means 'a bad or wicked son'; Karni, quick as a flash, riposted that he wasn't a *'kupoot'* by any stretch of

imagination, since his father, the Maharaj Kumar, would never call him one, but he could be called a *'kupautra'* or a wicked grandson! Maharaja Ganga Singh's eyes sparked with fire at this repartee, and it was with effort that he swallowed his anger as sovereign-cum-grandfather. (Forty five years later, his repentant fond grandson was to record the incident on a cassette-tape, regretting the unwitting hurt he had caused the beloved old man who was so very fond of him).

Sometime after Karni Singh had obtained permission to work afresh for his school-leaving examination, came the official celebration of his eighteenth birthday. Instead of waiting till April (when his actual birthday fell), Maharaja Ganga Singh decided to host the formal banquet to mark the occasion a month earlier, in March 1942.

The coming-of-age of a prince had always been an important occasion in any State. In the case of Bikaner, Karni Singh's coming-of-age had special significance. As the press message issued officially to mark the occasion underlined, it was "...the first instance of a grandson attaining his majority in the life-time and reign of his grandfather during the 21 generations since the founding of the State of Bikaner".

The celebrations were well-attended, with the special guests including the rulers of Dungarpur, Porbandar, Wankaner, Palanpur and their relatives, among others. In addition, Karni Singh's sister, Princess Sushila Kumari and her husband, the heir-apparent of Udaipur/Mewar, arrived at Bikaner to a ceremonial *Muklawa* welcome that extended over March 6 and 7.

March 9, 1942, was declared a public holiday in Bikaner. For Karni Singh and his family, the morning was spent in visits to the temples of Lakshmi Narayan, Har Mandir and Devidwara, where appropriate rites were performed. Alms were also distributed by the Bhanwar and other family-members In the evening there was a review of the Bikaner State Army, followed by an At Home. There was also a display of fireworks, as well as illuminations at certain areas and buildings. This day was rounded off by a dinner party in the Shiv Bilas Dining room at Lallgarh Palace.

A glittering banquet to mark the occasion was attended by many Indian rulers and princes as well as Bikaneri nobles and British officials. At the appropriate juncture, Maharaja Ganga Singh raised a Toast of the King-Emperor. After this the Maharawal of Dungarpur proposed the Toast of Prince Karni Singh.

Speeches followed. It was then the turn of the young prince. The Bhanwar Karni Singh felt extremely nervous as the moment for him to speak approached. Feeling as if his knees would give way under him, but masking his nervousness, Karni Singh read out a beautifully prepared speech, which his grandfather had dictated, on this occasion. At the end of his prepared speech, he added an impromptu request to the Maharaja, asking him for permission to join the Air Force and go to War. The answer, predictably, was in the negative.

Once the eldest Bhanwar Saheb of Bikaner had attained his majority, his administrative training load increased. Now, he was encouraged to participate in general affairs of State. In the December of that year, the Prince appeared for the Senior Cambridge examination as a private candidate from the Lawrence School centre at Mt. Abu. When the results were declared it was found that he had secured six credits in the six subjects that he had taken. He later mused that if he had taken the 'Easy Hindi' option he might have secured an 'A' with a 1st division. As it was, the Prince had to settle for a very high IInd division with all credits — a commendable effort for a young man who was learning how to administer a large kingdom like Bikaner.

With the success of his Senior Cambridge examination apparent for all to see, Karni Singh immediately approached his grandfather for permission to take up the Intermediate course at Dungar College — a two year course, preparatory to going on to University By this time, Maharaja Ganga Singh was a sick man, suffering from throat cancer which would eventually be the cause of his death, but he readily gave his permission.

Once again, it was Pandit Dashrath Sharma who would, over the next two years, supervise Karni Singh's studies, as the Prince worked as a private student in the evenings and continued with his administrative apprenticeship during the daytime. But this was still the beginning of 1943, and there was as yet another year and a half to go before he could take the Intermediate-level examinations.

It was at this time that a major change came to Bikaner. On February 2, 1943, Maharaja Ganga Singh, the architect of modern Bikaner, passed away at Bombay.

The Maharaja's last thoughts were for his land and his people The greening of his desert kingdom had remained his most consistent aim, and once the Gang Canal was in operation he had devoted his energies

towards planning and raising funds for a further irrigation system.

As he lay dying of cancer in Bombay, Maharaja Ganga Singh came out of his coma briefly. "Get me the Bhakra Dam file," he said

The words, uttered almost with the Maharaja's last breath, remained with Karni Singh for the rest of his life. Maharaja Ganga Singh lapsed back into a coma and passed away a short while later at 5.25 a.m. the same day.

Five

HEIR-APPARENT OF BIKANER



WITH THE DEATH OF MAHARAJA GANGA SINGH IN FEBRUARY 1943, AN era in the history of Bikaner came to an end, and with the accession of Maharaja Sadul Singh to the Bikaner *gaddi*, Prince Karni Singh became the heir-apparent of the State of Bikaner. Following the demise of Maharaja Ganga Singh, the title of *'Bhanwar Saheb'* — the Maharaja's grandson, by which Karni Singh had been addressed since his early infancy, was gone forever. Henceforth, he would be known as *Maharaj-Kumar* — son of a Maharaja. He would also have to cope with many more administrative and other responsibilities, for which he had been prepared since childhood, as he learned to assist the new Maharaja, his father Sadul Singh.

The passing of the Maharaja at the age of 63 was a shock to everyone, not least to his 'Soldier Boy' grandson. As Karni Singh put it, "Maharaja Ganga Singh signified Bikaner and we couldn't quite imagine how anybody so powerful, so strong as he could actually die. What the loss meant to us and specially myself who had always enjoyed his fond care and attention can only be imagined rather than described. However, it was a great solace to find that our bereavement was shared by each one of the Bikaneri citizens and the loss mourned not only by his family and his peoples but was felt throughout India and even abroad"

For fifty-six years Ganga Singh had been the Maharaja of Bikaner. At his first *durbar* upon obtaining full powers on December 16, 1898, the eighteen-year-old Maharaja had solemnly pledged his life for the service of his people, and for the next forty-five years he had lived by that promise. Over the decades, Maharaja Ganga Singh had become synonymous with Bikaner and for Karni Singh and everyone else around him, it was difficult to imagine the State without his grandfather at its helm.

"The people treated him like a father figure," Karni Singh commented in an interview decades later. "...He always said to them, 'I see no difference between my son and my grandchildren and you. You are all my children and your welfare is my first responsibility'. He believed that because he was a proud Rajput and the Rajput tradition means to protect. He could be a tyrant if he wanted to but at that time it was the only way to get work done. Anybody who stood in the way of progress he had to sweep to the side" (Allen & Dwivedi 1984 : 106).

Having observed the traditional obsequies, the new Maharaja, Ganga Singh's heir Sadul Singh, ascended the ancestral throne of the Rathores as the 22nd ruler of Bikaner on March 8, 1943. The 22nd Maharaja's reign was to be a short but extremely momentous one. These were years of political upheavals and changes for British India as well as for the Indian States. Maharaja Sadul Singh, consequently, played a significant role in the Chamber of Princes. At the same time, he also worked for the welfare of the inhabitants of Bikaner State.

Upon accession to the *gaddi*, the Maharaja had announced his motto and guiding principle to be *'praja hita vratino vayam'* — a pledge dedicating his life in the service of his people, much as his father had done. Mindful of the well-being of the people of Bikaner, and continuing on the 'modernisation' path taken by his predecessor, he stressed education, industrialisation, and the democratisation of government. Along with this, he gave top priority to making potable water — the most precious commodity in a desert-land — available to villages of the State in adequate quantities.

As a first measure, therefore, in 1943 Sadul Singh created the Sadul Water Supply and rural reconstruction fund. A committee was formed with a budget of Rs. 40 lakh The amount was utilised towards community taps and pumps, and for the digging of new wells and tube-wells. Later, he also instituted scholarships and grants in the State. These included two scholarships at the Roorkee Engineering College in 1945,

war, just as his father had done. The offer was repeated upon his becoming Maharaja, both in a public speech on 8th March 1943 — the day of his accession — and through a letter dated 25 July 1943.

This time the offer was accepted, and on 26th October 1943, while his eldest son was busy with his administrative training and Intermediate-college level studies, Maharaja Sadul Singh left Bikaner for the Middle East front. With him went his younger son, Prince Amar Singh.

Having inspected Bikaner's Sadul Light Infantry and the 49th (Bikaner) G.P.T. Company, stationed in Persia (now Iran) and Iraq respectively, as well as some of the units of various other Indian State Forces and Imperial and Allied troops, including the 4th Indian Division and the 31st Indian and Armoured Division, Maharaja Sadul Singh returned to Bikaner in November 1943. Enroute, he stopped briefly in Sind to inspect the Ganga Risala then posted there.

Soon after the return of Maharaja Sadul Singh from the war-front, the people of Bikaner began to look forward to a season of festivities, as the dates for the marriages of Karni Singh and Amar Singh approached.

The months of February and March 1944 were a period of extended celebrations for the House of Bikaner, as first the elder Maharaj Kumar and then the younger one were married and Bikaner reverberated to the sounds of fireworks and music. The wedding of Maharaj Kumar Karni Singh with Princess Sushila Kumari of Dungarpur took place at Dungarpur on February 25, 1944, just a couple of months short of the Prince's 20th birthday. A few days later, on March 11, the marriage of Maharaj Kumar Amar Singh with Princess Manhar Kanwar, daughter of Dhrangadhra's Prince Shri Bhupat Sinhji and a niece of His Highness the Jam Saheb of Jamnagar was celebrated at Jamnagar. Both marriages had been arranged by family elders as was tradition at that time.

The marriages carried the blessings of Maharaja Ganga Singh, though the proud grandfather had not lived to see either Karni Singh or Amar Singh as bridegrooms.

The old Maharaja had, however, been present at the engagement ceremonies of both his grandsons, as he had been for the marriage of his granddaughter, Princess Sushila Kumari of Bikaner, with the heir to the Mewar *gaddi*, Maharaj Kumar Bhagwat Singh of Udaipur, in 1940 at a glittering ceremony attended by numerous Indian Princes and other dignitaries. The youngest of her siblings, Prince Amar Singh, recalls that

"the only time I saw tears in the Old Man's [Maharaja Ganga Singh's] eyes was when my sister left Bikaner as a bride for her new home".

(Ten years prior to that, in the years unshadowed by the clouds of World War II, Bikaner had witnessed another splendid, well-attended royal wedding when Maharaja Ganga Singh's daughter, Princess Shiv Kumari, had married the heir-apparent (later ruler) of Kota, Maharaj Kumar Bhim Singh, son of Maharao Umed Singh II of Kota in 1930).

In the traditional manner, the *pandits* had matched the individual horoscopes of Karni Singh and his prospective bride before their engagement in 1940, but Karni Singh believed that even if he hadn't been told that the two matched perfectly, he would have realised it from the extremely compatible manner in which both of them were to spend the rest of their lives together.

Karni Singh and his bride were not totally unknown to each other, though, as the ruling families of Bikaner and Dungarpur were very close. The ruler of Dungarpur, His Highness the Maharawal Lakshman Singh, had long regarded Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner as his uncle; and in his turn, the Bikaner ruler thought very highly of his Dungarpur protégé An alliance between the two States therefore seemed eminently desirable to both rulers.

On his part, Karni Singh and his siblings had met and played at Bombay with the Dungarpur princess, as they had with a few other young princes and princesses. In Karni Singh's own words, "Ours was, in some ways, a childhood romance because for my generation marriages were fixed by the parents but my wife and I had met as children when she was 9 and I was 14 in Bombay, and we had played together" Consequently, when Maharaja Ganga Singh sounded out his grandson about the idea of an alliance into the Dungarpur family, the Prince unhesitatingly indicated his approval!

Of course, at that time Karni Singh did not know that both families had already discussed the issue in the summer of 1939, following the betrothal of Karni Singh's sister with the heir-apparent of Udaipur. In the last week of September, Maharaj Virbhadra Singh, younger brother of Maharawal Lakshman Singh of Dungarpur, arrived in Bikaner bearing a formal proposal, on behalf of the ruler of Dungarpur, for the marriage of Bikaner's elder Bhanwar Saheb, Karni Singh, with Princess Sushila Kumari, the second daughter of the Maharawal. On September 30, Maharaja Ganga Singh sent a telegram to Maharawal Lakshman Singh accepting

the proposal. The information was also conveyed to Viceroy Linlithgow and His Imperial Majesty, the King-Emperor, a couple of days later.

On October 14, 1939, a press release was issued at Bikaner by the Director of Publicity announcing that: "A marriage has been arranged between Prince Karni Singhji Bahadur, elder Grandson of His Highness the Maharajah Bikaner, and the Princess Sushil Kanwarji, Second Daughter of His Highness the Maharawal of Dungarpur. The formal Betrothal Ceremony is expected to take place on the 23rd November".

As a matter of fact, however, it was January 1940 before the betrothal of Karni Singh was formally celebrated at Bikaner with pomp and splendour. On the morning of January 15, the Dungarpur deputation arrived at Bikaner to a ceremonial welcome. The same evening there was an informal dinner party at Lallgarh Palace. The 16th was declared as a public holiday. At 11 am that morning, the formal betrothal ceremonies, hallowed by tradition, were conducted in the Durbar hall of Ganga Niwas, within the fort This was followed by a visit to the Harmandir temple, along with customary *Badhai baithna* celebrations and distribution of *gur* (jaggery) and *narel* (coconut) on behalf of the Maharaja. Alms were also distributed to the poor.

Later, the deputation from Dungarpur, headed by Maharaj Virbhadra Singh (the Dungarpur ruler's brother), and including nobles (*sardars*) and high officials was received by Maharaja Ganga Singh at a specially convened *durbar* in the Fort. The Dungarpur delegation arrived bearing customary presents — jewels, horses, elephants, and so forth.

On January 19, 1940, Karni Singh went to Deshnoke to pay reverence to the patron-deity of the Bikaneri Rathores after whom he had been named and seek the blessings of both Karniji and Sri Nediji. However, though the betrothal ceremony had been performed in 1940, it was clearly understood that the marriage would not take place for another 3-4 years at the very least.

As the preparations began at Bikaner for the two royal weddings, Maharaj Mandhata Singh was named as the 'Director of Wedding Arrangements' and was given the overall duty of seeing to the different rituals as well as for receiving and looking after the important guests. As in the case of the previous royal weddings in Bikaner, a 'Statement of Distribution of Duties' was issued, detailing the tasks of different ministers and officers.

In view of the World War that was raging at the time, however, and

taking into consideration the war-related shortage of paper, petrol, etc., Maharaja Sadul Singh had decided to celebrate both marriages with far greater simplicity than was customary. Thus, it was announced that, contrary to practice, all the various *sardars*, nobles, officers, *seths* and *sahukars* (merchants and business magnates), and other State functionaries were not being invited to accompany the bridegrooms' wedding parties to Dungarpur and Jamnagar.

Furthermore, the ruler declared that, "...as was done in the past no Detailed Instructions will be issued in regard to each and every item of the Programmes and Festivities in connection with the Weddings of the Maharaj Kumar Sri Karni Singhji Bahadur and the Maharaj Kumar Sri Amar Singhji Bahadur". Instead, he gave instructions "...to ensure that all necessary arrangements are made on the usual lines for which purpose the instructions issued on the occasion of the Wedding of the Princess Sushil Kanwarji Sahib may generally be taken as a guide".

On Saturday, February 19, the ceremony of *Hath Dhan* was performed at the Devidwara in the fort for Maharaj Kumar Karni Singh. This was followed by an informal dinner party at Lallgarh. At 11.53 a m on February 21, the preliminary ceremonies of *Toran* and *Vinayak-pujan* were performed at the Fort.

By February 22, many of the ruling Princes and other guests who were to form the bridegroom's *baraat* (wedding) party had arrived in the capital city of Bikaner. At 11.30 a.m. the same morning, the traditional *Mahera Dastoor* (from the maternal relatives) was presented on behalf of the princely State of Rewa by the Maharaj Kumar of Rewa in the Ante Room of the Karni Niwas wing of Lallgarh Palace This was followed by the presentation of *Dastoors* from other States, at a function held in the Durbar Hall of Karni Niwas

The next day was declared a public holiday, since that was the day that Prince Karni Singh was to leave Bikaner for his wedding ceremony at Dungarpur. The day began early for him as certain religious ceremonies were scheduled for 8.15 a.m. that morning at the fort. There was excitement amongst the rest of the people too, and much before 8 a m , the *Chaugan* space in front of the fort was packed with people. There were also rows of soldiers, waiting to present arms and join in the procession that would later issue forth from the fort.

After the ceremonies, Karni Singh proceeded from the Fort, seated on an elephant-back in a golden *howdah*, in a state procession made up of

elephants, horses, musicians, chariots, regalia, soldiers, officials and nobles etc. Crowds lined the streets for a sight of their elder Maharaj Kumar, despite the drizzle that had persisted all morning, as the mile-long procession moved towards the railway station. Here, a Special Train waited to carry the Bikaner *baraat* party to the shrine of Karniji at Deshnoke, and then on towards Dungarpur.

After the visit to the temples at Deshnoke as per custom, Prince Karni Singh's special train left for Udaipur at 8 p.m. that evening. The next afternoon, the Bikaner marriage party arrived at the capital of the State of Udaipur/Mewar and was personally welcomed at the railway station by His Highness, the Maharana of Udaipur and his staff. Immediately, an advance party carried on to Dungarpur by road, reaching their destination the same evening. Meanwhile, Karni Singh and the rest of the Bikaner *baraat* party stayed overnight at Udaipur, availing of the hospitality of the Maharana of Udaipur. (In keeping with tradition, none of the ladies of the Bikaner royal family formed part of the *baraat*).

The group proceeded by cars for Dungarpur at 8 a.m. the next morning. For the royal bridegroom, the car-journey between Udaipur and Dungarpur was to remain unforgettable for one particular reason. In his own words (as recalled 42 years afterwards), "We spent the night at Udaipur, and the late Maharana Saheb of Udaipur, His Highness Bhupal Singhji, laid on everything for the Bikaner *baraat*. Maharaja of Jodhpur Umaid Singhji, Maharaja of Pratapgarh Ram Singhji, my father [Maharaja Sadul Singh], myself and my brother all travelled in one car from Udaipur to Dungarpur, and my brother — a year and a half younger than me — was so sleepy that he went to sleep on Maharaja of Pratapgarh's lap!"

Evidently the Maharaja of Pratapgarh was not perturbed by this. He was very closely related to the Bikaner royal family, being a cousin to Sadul Singh, whose mother had been a Pratapgarh princess.

The Bikaner party arrived at the outskirts of the capital city of Dungarpur just before 11 a m. They were accorded a grand welcome — the *Mijmani* — led by the Maharawal of Dungarpur. After the groom had been greeted following traditional rites, the Bikaner party was taken in procession to the *Janwasa* where they were to stay. Later that afternoon followed the customary *Bari* and *Padla Dastoors*, which were taken to the Dungarpur Palace by select members of Bikaner's nobility.

Meanwhile, back at Bikaner, yet another public holiday had been

declared in the entire state. This was accompanied by the release of prisoners at 8 o'clock in the morning in commemoration of the wedding of the state's heir-apparent. At 5.15 in the afternoon, the ceremony of *lagan dastoor* was held for Karni Singh at Virendra Bhawan.

It was well past 6 in the evening when Maharaj Kumar Karni Singh of Bikaner left the *Janwasa*, as arranged, in a grand state procession. He was accompanied by the Princes and others who made up his *baraat* party. As the wedding procession passed through the picturesque, old city of Dungarpur, it attracted all eyes. For the young bridegroom, however, it was not the glorious pomp and show of medieval splendour, as one royal house welcomed another, that was to become unforgettable, but two rather small incidents connected with this wedding procession.

As Karni Singh recalled it, "When the *baraat* started, I was on an elephant and as we went through one of these big gates a pigeon flew past and I nearly lost my safa (turban)! Then, as we went through the old fort, where the actual wedding took place, crackers were let off and flashbulbs went off and the elephant almost went mad. That was a very scary moment."

Upon arriving at the Toran Pol gate of the Palace, Karni Singh reached up and hit the ceremonial *toran* hanging from the top of the gate with his sword, as custom demanded. Then he dismounted from his elephant in front of the *Zenani Deori* — the entrance leading to the innermost palace quarters — for the ritual of *dwara-puja*. Following this, Dungarpur's royal priest performed the additional welcoming rites of *pekhna* and *arati* at the outer door of the *Zenani Deori*, after which the young groom entered the portals.

Once within, Karni Singh was welcomed by similar ceremonies of *pekhna* and *arati* at the inner portal by the Maharani of Dungarpur The Prince was then led to the sanctified area where the marriage ceremony was to be performed. Cannons boomed as the Maharaj Kumar of Bikaner and his bride took their places for the ceremony. The chanting of sacred scriptures by the officiating priests, and the voices of women singing auspicious songs all mingled. The wedding ceremony continued upto 10.27 p.m., when the final ritual concluded and the marriage was solemnised.

Almost immediately afterwards, Karni Singh and his new bride left the Old Palace of Dungarpur for the *janwasa* in a state procession. The members of the Bikaner *baraat* party led the way, flanked by the highest

among the nobles — *sardars* and *umraos* — of Dungarpur. Inspite of the late hour, crowds still lined the streets and it took the procession over an hour to reach its destination.

The next morning, Dungarpur's Maharaj Kumars arrived at the *janwasa* and, as tradition prescribed, ceremonially escorted their sister, Princess Sushila Kumari, back to the Old Palace. A little later, at 11:45 a.m Karni Singh also reached the Old Palace, where he was welcomed by the Maharawal of Dungarpur, his father-in-law, and escorted to the Durbar Hall of the Dungarpur Palace for the ceremonial *juhari*.

On 27th, Princess Sushila Kumari of Dungarpur was given an emotional send-off from Bijay Bhawan, as she left her native Dungarpur with her husband and the rest of the Bikaner party in a cavalcade of cars. The cavalcade arrived at Udaipur just before 7 p.m. and carried on for Bikaner by a special train.

February 28, was once again a public holiday at Bikaner. The train arrived at Deshnoke, and after reverence had been paid at the temples, the train carried its royal passengers on to Bikaner. Here the arrival of Karni Singh and his bride was being eagerly awaited by family and well-wishers alike. A 'Public Arrival' — which included a Guard of Honour, was accorded as the train finally arrived. Waiting to welcome the Maharaj Kumar and his bride were many ministers, army officers, administrative officials, and scores of other people.

Following a formal welcome at the railway station, the newly married couple were taken to the fort in a resplendent state procession. Besides the usual Bikaner contingents, this procession also included not only the gaily caparisoned horses, bands, insignia etc. from Dungarpur, but also soldiers of the smartly turned-out Dungar Lancers. Karni Singh rode seated in a golden *howdah* on elephant-back, while Bikaner's new crown-princess, accompanied by her ladies-in-waiting, rode in the State Landau carriage Wending its way past cheering onlookers, the procession arrived at the fort for a ceremonial welcome and religious ceremonies. Once these were concluded, the bride and bridegroom left the Fort for the Lallgarh Palace complex by cars. Here the young bride was welcomed by the Maharani of Bikaner and further ceremonials followed.

The very next day, almost before the Maharaja and the group which had returned with Karni Singh from Dungarpur had had a chance to catch their breath, began the various rituals connected with the marriage of Bikaner's younger Maharaj Kumar, Amar Singh. As for Karni Singh,

Amar Singh's *hath dhan* ceremony was conducted at the Fort, and as before this was followed by distribution of alms etc.

By March 2, many other ruling princes and other guests had arrived in Bikaner to join in the double celebrations. Over the next five days, there was a surfeit of festivities at Bikaner celebrating, on the one hand the marriage of Karni Singh, and on the other the forthcoming wedding of Amar Singh.

Besides all these festivities, there was an 'At Home' hosted by Maharaj Bhairun Singh on one evening at the King-Emperor George VI Stadium, and yet another one hosted jointly by Maharaj Mandhata Singh and his younger brother, Maharaj Ajatshatru Singh, on a subsequent evening, at the Victoria Memorial Club.

On March 7, Karni Singh joined in the *dastoor* presentation ceremonies connected with Amar Singh's marriage. As had been the case before, the ritual began with the presentation of the *Mahera Dastoor* brought from Rewa State. Then came the presentation of *Dastoors* from other States. This was followed by a dinner party later that evening in the Karni Niwas Durbar Hall.

On March 8, Maharaj Kumar Amar Singh with his *baraat* party left for his wedding at Jamnagar. After religious ceremonies at the fort, he left for the railway station in a state procession, just like his brother had done not so very long ago. (Remembering the occasion 51 years later, Amar Singh says, "The day was warm, I was chaffing at the feel of my new gold brocade *achkan* coat and the movement of the elephant, and wondering how my brother had put up with all these state processions!") As had been done for Karni Singh and his bride, the special train bringing the younger Maharaj Kumar and his bride to Bikaner also halted at Deshnoke for religious rites on the return journey.

Barely had the festive banners come down, and while sporadic celebrations were still continuing, Prince Karni Singh returned to his books for last-minute revisions for his final examinations. He had completed the two year Intermediate college course under the guidance of Dashrathji in the space of just over a year and a bit as a private student, and was registered to appear as a private candidate from Bikaner's local Dungar College.

These final examinations took place, as scheduled, just three weeks after his marriage with the Princess of Dungarpur In fact, Karni Singh had returned to Bikaner only five days before the first exam, after accompa-

nying the Bikaner wedding party to Jamnagar for the marriage of his younger brother.

When the results were declared, Karni Singh found to his delight that he had secured a good IInd Division. The Prince had already convinced his father to allow him to carry-on with his studies. As he put it, "My educational career was always an uphill task, but once I made up my mind, I was a very determined boy." Thus, having got Maharaja Sadul Singh's approval, he now began preparations to go on to the prestigious St. Stephen's College at Delhi for his B.A. in History.

Maharaja Sadul Singh's official note dated June 16, 1944 clarified that he had "...decided that Prince Karni Singhji will continue his studies in the Delhi University for the B.A. course and Prince Amar Singhji will also be staying in Delhi for preparing for the Senior Cambridge Examination for which he is appearing in December next. ...It has been decided that the two Princesses will also be accompanying the Princes to Delhi." All the travel and other expenses of the two Princesses and their staff and servants, stated the Maharaja's note, would be met from his own Privy Purse, and not be a burden on the State exchequer.

An entourage, including one doctor, a compounder, besides attendants, cooks and so forth, were sent with the two Maharaj Kumars to Delhi as part of their 'establishment'. Pandit Dashrath Sharma was also asked to accompany them.

The admission of Karni Singh to St. Stephen's College had been facilitated by the Prime Minister of Bikaner, Sardar K.M. Pannikar (later India's Ambassador to China), through the latter's friendship with Sir Maurice Gwyer, Vice Chancellor of the University of Delhi. A couple of years later, his younger brother, Amar Singh also joined the same institution.

St. Stephen's College proved a wonderful experience for the prince. It not only provided good teaching and sports facilities, but also stressed on dramatics, debates and similar activities. Many of Karni Singh's college-mates would, in the years to come, go on to occupy important positions in a variety of occupations, including administration, the diplomatic service, armed forces, judiciary and the world of academia in India.

On his first day at college in July 1944, the Prince walked up from the outer gates determined that no fellow-student should find out that was the heir-apparent of Bikaner. A naturally shy man, he had no desire to

teenth birthday along with permission to drink.

Maharaja Ganga Singh had been a heavy smoker himself throughout his life. His preference was for a particular brand of small strong Egyptian cigarettes, known as 'Princess' cigarettes. Made from Egyptian tobacco, these cigarettes were individually embossed in gold with the crest of the VIPs who had ordered them.

Consequently, in the case of Maharaja Ganga Singh, the cigarettes bore the Bikaner crest. The cigarettes came packaged in small tins, which carried the crests of all their important users, including Bikaner, on the cover and used to be ordered by the dozens to Bikaner as and when required. Before the days of menthol cigarettes, Maharaja Ganga Singh liked them to be cool, specially during the hot summer months, and these would be kept in the refrigerator for him. Ironically, it was cancer of the throat that had eventually led to his death.

In the case of the Princes Karni Singh and Amar Singh, possibly due to their mother's influence, neither were they presented cigarette-cases on their respective eighteenth birthdays nor given the green signal to drink This was just as well, perhaps, since the brothers had already put their heads together and opted not to drink alcohol at all. As Karni Singh put it, "Both of us had decided that we would be individualists and that we had adequate drink in our blood to last us a generation, and that we would not drink." A few years later, Karni Singh took to drinking vast quantities of Coca Cola instead; a habit that was to stay with him all his life.

College at Delhi meant freedom in many ways for the young heir-apparent of Bikaner. Decades afterwards, he was to muse in a cassette-recording how, "...from the day I was born, till I was an adult I was groomed to be a Prince and a future Maharaja, and yet I found that my heart and soul wished that I was an ordinary person. ..A great deal of attention was given to our upbringing, our behaviour, our ability to speak English, and over and above that, our conduct in public. So much so that even as children we were taught how to return salutations, to speak in a civil manner, and how not to be rowdy in public. It was, therefore, not surprising that as time went on, my mind found these fetters too troublesome, and when I went to College at the age of 20, a couple of months after I was married, I found that for the first time I tasted some kind of freedom — freedom from custom, freedom from tradition, and freedom from the necessity to behave myself all the time."

At the same time, even if studying at Delhi provided a taste of liberty, being a college student meant a continuation, albeit in a modified way, of the time-tables and studies and sports schedules that had been with the prince all his life. As he informed his father in a private letter written soon after joining St. Stephen's, "College starts at 7.30 in the morning. My class does not start till 9, but we are all expected to go and attend the prayers." He soon fell into the routine of classes in the mornings at college, from where he would return to his 10 Pusa Road home for lunch around 2 or 2 15 in the afternoon. The rest of the day would be spent in studies, rest, games and occasionally a movie.

During this period at college, Karni Singh regularly returned to Bikaner during the holidays and, with permission, on other special occasions. In addition, he also kept in touch with his parents at Bikaner. He had always been close to his mother, but with his father the affinity and association had developed gradually, more so from his teenage years onwards.

Now, more than ever, the father and son were learning about each other. Karni Singh was beginning to rely on his father in a manner somewhat similar to the way in which he had depended on his unforgettable grandfather. As far as letters (and even telegrams) to his father were concerned, the subject-matter ranged from personal matters like advice on whether he should go in for a second-hand Chrysler and what to wear at the Viceroy's informal party, to cajoling the Maharaja into acquiring an aeroplane for Bikaner, to larger issues of topical interest.

Soon after coming to Delhi in 1944, Karni Singh wrote a long letter to his father against the custom of *purdah* — the veiling of women and their seclusion from public eyes — prevalent, along with others, among the elite of Bikaner (Rajput and non-Rajput alike) In an almost essay-like communication, the young Maharaj Kumar logically argued the case against *purdah* so eloquently that Maharaja Sadul Singh gradually began to discourage the practice in the Bikaner ruling house. However, Karni Singh's mother, the Maharani Sudarshan Kumari, could never be convinced to give up *purdah* fully while at Bikaner, though his wife, the Yuvrani Sushila Kumari eventually dropped the practice

On another occasion, in an intensely frank and confidential letter to Maharaja Sadul Singh, written in January 1945, the young Maharaj Kumar poured out his appreciation of his parents and their role in providing him and his brother and sister with the happy family life he had

known. Apologizing for penning "an emotional letter", the prince went on to ask pardon for any hurt he may ever have unwittingly caused his parents.

Surprised and touched in no small measure (since Maharaja Ganga Singh and Sadul Singh had never been able to express their personal feelings to each other in such a manner), Sadul Singh wrote back promptly. He acknowledged the happiness Karni's "rather emotional letter" had given him, and assured him that at no time had his beloved son given his parents cause for hurt. Referring to Maharani Sudarshan Kumari, and matching his son's frankness, Sadul Singh further wrote, "She had been a wonderful companion and helpmate to me during the last 23 years of a very difficult time and I am happy to feel that you also realize what a good mother she has been to you all".

Meanwhile, in November 1944, Maharaja Sadul Singh had once again proceeded to the war-front; this time to the Assam-Burma front where the Bikaner Bijey Battery was on active service. As before, Amar Singh accompanied him, but since Karni Singh was busy at college in Delhi, he could not accompany the Bikaner group. The group returned to Bikaner in December via Calcutta, where the Maharaja received a stirring reception from the business community of Bikaneri origin settled there. Later, the 1939-45 Star, Burma Star, Defence Medal and the War Medal were conferred on Maharaja Sadul Singh and his party.

Karni Singh's former Hindi teacher, Pandit Dashrath Sharma, had so far played an important role in the education of the prince. His pupil appreciated the Pandit's knowledge and guidance, and upon joining college in Delhi, he had been pleased to learn that Dashrathji continued to tutor him. In 1945, Maharaja Sadul Singh formally appointed Pandit Dashrath Sharma as Secretary to Karni Singh. At Delhi, the Pandit used to help the elder Maharaj Kumar of Bikaner with his studies every evening. Always a serious student, Karni Singh had opted for the Honours course in History with Political Science as his second subject, and with this additional tutoring by Dashrathji, completed the 3 year course in 2 years

1946 began on a high note for the Bikaner family. On January 13, 1946, a son — later to be formally bestowed the name Narendra Singh — was born to Maharaj Kumar Karni Singh and the Yuvrani Sushila Kumari. As the excitement and birth-related ceremonies and festivities carried on, the young Maharaj Kumar forced himself to settle down to his studies in all seriousness, since just a couple of months later, in March '46, he was to

take the B A. Honours final examinations.

It was not easy, even after the traipsing between Delhi and Bikaner and back had ended, and the new 'Bhanwar' had settled down at Karni Singh's Delhi-based household. To the proud father, who was sitting up late to study for his final examinations, it seemed as if his little infant son spent practically all night crying! Fortunately, Dashrathji was around to assist his royal ex-pupil in his preparations. Both of them regularly sat up till the early hours of the morning, until Dashrathji was satisfied with the prince's preparations.

Backed by his hours of serious study, Karni Singh walked out of the examination hall feeling he had done reasonably well. When the results were declared, Karni Singh learnt that he had secured the 2nd position in Delhi University, with a IInd division, finishing with just eight points less than that year's top student, Iftikhar Ahmed, who also happened to be from St. Stephen's.

As the prince was back at Bikaner when the results came out, he learned of his achievements through a telegram sent by the Principal of St. Stephen's, Mr. Rajaram. "Second in University second division. Congratulations." ran the telegram, much to the thrill of its recipient. In a state of high excitement, Karni Singh immediately went to his father and told him the news, and Maharaja Sadul Singh responded by standing up and saluting his heir. "I felt very very puffed-up," Karni Singh recalled years later.

To secure the distinction of the 2nd position in the University was no mean achievement for the Crown-Prince of Bikaner who had, between 1944 and 1946, often needed to take up the state's responsibilities, played tennis for his college team and golf for pleasure regularly, and seen over two hundred films in the two years he was at University! Though the achievement was the result of his own hard work, Karni Singh was to consistently acknowledge his overall debt to his teacher, Dashrathji, to whom he always remained grateful.

Meanwhile, around the middle of 1945, Sadul Singh had seriously considered the notion of sending Karni Singh to Oxford or Cambridge or London for further education, accompanied by the latter's wife. With this in mind, in June 1945, the Maharaja corresponded with Mr. John P. Sargent, Educational Adviser to the Govt. of India, and with Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, seeking their views and advice. Both replied favourably and offered every assistance, including

towards securing a place for the prince at Oxford. In the event, however, for reasons Maharaja Sadul Singh never made public, Karni Singh was finally not sent abroad to study after his B.A.

At the same time, however, Prince Karni Singh was keen on continuing his education. He was further encouraged in this aspiration by Pandit Dashrath Sharma. Karni Singh thus sought permission from Maharaja Sadul Singh to enroll for a Ph.D. in History. This being readily given, in June 1946, he joined the Father Heras Institute of Historical Research at Bombay University's St. Xavier's College.

From Bombay, the Maharaj Kumar wrote to his father, seeking the latter's opinion about whether he should also pursue a law course concurrently with his Ph.D, and go to London for the Bar exams when required to do so He also wanted Sadul Singh's views about whether he should take up a post — even a low paid one — in either the Government of India's Secretariat at Delhi or the Foreign Service, so as to serve the India of the future — since an independent India was on the cards.

The Foreign Office, he wrote, would mean being away from India for a long spell, however. This he was not very keen on for the time being. Maharaja Sadul Singh promptly wrote back, approving heartily of his sentiments and desire to serve India, and to pursure law. At the same time, the Maharaja disapproved of the idea of Bikaner's heir-apparent working in the Government of India Secretariat. He suggested, instead, that the Prince carry on with his Ph D studies and with assisting in Bikaner administration for the time being.

The subject the Maharaj Kumar had selected for his Ph.D thesis at that time was 'The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Mughals'. He worked on this topic under the guidance of Father Heras intermittently between 1946-1949, and as the bulk of the primary study material for his work was available in the archives of Bikaner State, he was able to spend long stretches of time at Bikaner. It was during one of these stretches at Bikaner that Karni Singh prepared a detailed note (dated 13-3-1947) on 'Recommendations on Education in Bikaner State' for his father to peruse, and undertook similar exercises connected with the possible future development of the State of Bikaner

Since this was also the period that led up to Indian Independence and later the merger of Bikaner with India, Karni Singh necessarily needed to spend more time at administrative matters rather than at his research work. In later years he recalled how "...the work at Bikaner during this

time was so hectic and I was required by my father to spend time with him. Consequently, my Ph.D work was virtually left pending". Eventually he decided to quit his thesis-work, being fully occupied with assisting his father in administrative work at Bikaner.

(By the time the Ph.D work was to be eventually started again under the guidance of Father Coelho, after a longish break, Karni Singh had become a Member of Parliament and Dashrathji was teaching at Delhi University Nonetheless, the two corresponded on a regular basis with each other, and the Pandit gave the Maharaja useful advice and criticism on his work It was a proud day for both of them when Karni Singh submitted his thesis to Bombay University in 1964 under the title of 'The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers — 1465 to 1949'. But all that was still in the future.)

It was also during this period leading up to Indian Independence that work began on Karni Singh's own house — Karni Bhawan. The seed for an independent house had been sown in his mind during his childhood, when his father built a house at Vallabh Gardens in the late 1930's. He never forgot how "...in the late '30's it had become an interest point for all grown-up members of the family to think in terms of independent houses, even though Maharaja Ganga Singh was still alive. Vallabh Garden, Chand Cottage and the main house in Vallabh Garden itself were constructed by my father with beautiful gardens, with perhaps the best flowers grown in Bikaner".

In the long run, it was an incident involving a pig that served as a catalyst for Karni Singh finally deciding to build his own house

As he worded it, "I have an abhorrent hatred and fear of killing animals in cold blood even though I have shot birds and animals in shikar. ...One day a pig was slaughtered [in Lallgarh Palace] in the main kitchen which was located beneath my wife's room in Shiv Bilas. This was a time when keeping chicken and quail for the table was a common occurrence. The pig made such a terrible noise, that it was almost bloodcurdling. My wife was expecting our son Narendra Singh at that time, and I was so upset that I wrote to my father straight away saying that if a pig had to be slaughtered it shouldn't be done under our windows. And I asked for permission to live somewhere else. Of course, my father was very considerate and such a thing never happened again "

"That very day I decided to build my own house. A few days later we selected land outside Lallgarh, where the present Karni Bhawan is, and I

requested my father for permission to buy this land. He said that it could be given to me by the State free of cost; this was conveyed to me by Mr. M.U Menon, his Private Secretary, but I requested that I be allowed to buy the land, as I would prefer to own the land and house legally."

".. The *patta* [deed] was then made and Karni Bhawan was built. The foundation stone was laid by Pandit Dashrath Sharma, my teacher, as I was not in Bikaner and the construction took over two years and cost an enormous amount of money."

"..When Integration took place, I was present at the meetings when Mr. V.P. Menon, on behalf of the Government, suggested to my father at the time of the Private Property Settlement, that both his sons [the two Maharaj Kumars] should be given rupees five lakhs to build personal houses, as was done in the case of the Jaipur sons. And my father asked us, and I told him that I was not interested in accepting any government money at all, because I was young and in my older years I didn't want to be hounded out of my homes, so I wanted to own my own house and not accept any money from the Government."

Unfortunately for Karni Singh, circumstances deemed that he was never to live in his 'Karni Bhawan' for any length of time. For, not long after the construction was completed, he succeeded his father as Maharaja, and later went on to Parliament.

In later years he was to lament that, "...the house has a jinx. We have twice tried to live in it and both times had to give it up. I now have a feeling that this will never be our home, no matter how much we may love it ...For one thing, the army ranges are situated so close that their bullets fall into our property, and in addition to this, the noise in winter is such that you can't sit in the gardens. ..It is sad that we can't live in this house which I built in 1947, completed in 1949, and have maintained ever since".

Meanwhile, the world around was changing rapidly. Concurrently, efforts for Indian Independence had entered a new phase with independence appearing imminent.

While the outer world was undergoing its post-war upheaval along with nationalist striving for Indian independence, changes were taking place in Bikaner too, with Maharaja Sadul Singh encouraging the further democratisation of the state's legislative machinery and so forth.

During this time, one minor change that took place in Bikaner entailed its ruling family taking to flying and aeroplanes whole-

heartedly! Despite Maharaja Ganga Singh's disapproval of aeroplanes, by the 1940's, piloting a plane was as necessary a part of a prince's training as was learning how to drive a car. Karni Singh and Amar Singh had already learnt the latter under the supervision of their father.

Then came flying. Karni Singh mentioned the possibility often in letters written to his father while at college in Delhi and brought up the subject when back home at Bikaner. By late 1946 Maharaja Sadul Singh had been persuaded by his elder son to buy an aeroplane.

This ex-Air Force Aeroconsul, the first of many that the Bikaner family was to possess, was a twin engined English 'plane made of plywood and fibre. The Maharaja had arranged for Squadron Leader Conley, a former RAF pilot, to fly the plane in from London to Bikaner, and as could have been expected, Karni Singh was amongst the people who watched it land at the airport at Bikaner for the very first time.

Though Karni Singh never got to fly this plane himself, the family did a lot of travelling about in it. When a four-seater Argus Fairchild was purchased a year or so later, however, Karni Singh promptly got Conley to teach him to fly it. He was thrilled beyond words when he was able to take his first solo flight after about seven hours at the hands of his instructor

After this beginning, Karni Singh did a lot of flying at Bikaner under the charge of Conley. There were even some plans to start a flying club at Bikaner, but around that time the merger happened, and the flying club could not materialise. Around the same time, Maharaja Sadul Singh purchased a sleek De Havilland Dove aircraft, which cost over three and a half lakh of rupees, and was used extensively by the family members

Besides the coming of aeroplanes, yet another change was the short-lived radio station that was set up in the capital. Karni Singh remembered how, "Sometime in 1946-47, just before the Merger, attempts were made by Mr. Padmanabhan to set up an experimental transmission radio station in Bikaner. It was a lot of fun and gramophone records were played and people were able to pick it up on their radios. It didn't last long though. A few years later, however, All India Radio opened out its branch in Bikaner itself."

It was also around this time that Maharaja Sadul Singh came to the conclusion that a common flag was also important for people to have a sense of pride in their own land and history. He therefore introduced what was called a 'Peoples Flag'. This flag could be hoisted and used by

any citizen of Bikaner at any time they wished. The 'Peoples Flag' was different from the state flag, which bore the ancient honorific of *Jai Jangaldhar Badshah* and the royal crest. While the state flag was *kesariya* and *kasoomal* (saffron and red) in colour, the peoples flag had a diagonal line in *kesariya* and *kasoomal* with *'Jai Bikana'* and the emblem of the famed Khejri tree of the desert on it. The peoples flag was ceremoniously presented by Maharaja Sadul Singh to a public representative at a function at Bikaner's stadium. This flag only had a brief existence, though, because a few short years later Bikaner moved towards a merger with India.

Meanwhile, though World War II had ended while Karni Singh was still at St. Stephen's, the processes of worldwide change were still continuing. In India, the movement towards complete Independence had accelerated. It was a time for socio-political transformations for the Princely Indian States too, and Bikaner took a major role in initiating certain changes within the State.

Six

THE YEARS OF CHANGE



THE YEARS BETWEEN WORLD WAR II AND KARNI SINGH'S ACCESSION TO the throne of Bikaner were witness to much change and transformation within Bikaner as well as outside of it. One of the most significant of these was India's independence, and Karni Singh would never forget the heady feeling he shared with thousands of others as India celebrated her freedom on August 15, 1947.

"At the time India became independent," he stated twenty-five years after the event, recalling the momentous occasion with clarity in a tape-recorded interview given in July 1972, "I was just out of St. Stephen's College in Delhi. Those of us who were in college at that time were swept by the great wave of enthusiasm that existed at the time of Independence. The feelings of nationalism and emotional integration was so great that, whether it be the freedom fighters themselves or the students in colleges, the feelings for independence were shared by each alike."

"What remains in my memory most vividly is the fact that at that time to oust the British was one of the main things before our people. There was no feeling of regionalism or casteism, and there was no such thing as state politics; at that time all of us felt we were Indians and there was a great big job to do! Apart from this, we had great leaders — men who could claim to speak for the entire country. Men like Mahatma

Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel. Such giants, that the entire country had complete confidence in them. It was this leadership at this juncture in the life of our country that stands out vividly in my mind. And the leadership and the wave for achieving independence was something that one had to live through to imagine! I remember tuning onto the radio on Independence night, counting the minutes before our country became free."

The celebration which marked India's Independence day at Bikaner was also described by him subsequently in his book, *The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers — 1465-1949*, based on his Ph D thesis. He noted that, "The country-wide rejoicings on the attainment of Independence were celebrated with full enthusiasm in Bikaner on 15 August, 1947. The flag hoisting ceremony was performed by the Maharaja personally at the Stadium. In the evening, a State banquet was held at the Lallgarh Palace to celebrate the function at which Panikkar, while proposing the Maharaja's toast said: "We are all proud that the Maharaja has been one of the architects of the Independence of India." The Maharaja in his reply said that the day's celebrations were in honour of a great and historic event and that he had done his duty to India, to the States as a whole and to his State and his beloved people." (Singh 1974:311-312)

In the long run, independence also initiated perhaps the most drastic of changes for him personally and for the rest of India's princely order. Within the next quarter of a century India's princes and princesses would be relegated to the pages of history. For, with Independence the majority of India's Princes acceded their States to either the Dominion of India or to Pakistan.

The first to sign the Instrument of Accession, — on August 7, 1947 — was Maharaja Sadul Singh of Bikaner. These individual 'Instruments of Accession' expressly reserved and retained sovereignty and continuity of different state governments, while at the same time binding them either to independent India or the newly created Pakistan.

It was a decision of consequence for all the princes of the land. In his speech, delivered at a state banquet on August 15, 1947. Maharaja Sadul Singh clarified that, "With the lapse of paramountcy it was open to the States of India to stand aside and refuse to associate with the new Dominion Legally we could all have been independent today, for the suzerainty which we had surrendered to the British Crown had reverted to

us under the Indian Independence Act and we could have stood aside and not accede[d] to the Indian Dominion. A moment's consideration would show how disastrous the consequences would have been. It would have meant India breaking up into small fragments ..From the beginning my mind was made up. With full knowledge of its implications, I decided without hesitation to cooperate with these elements in India which were working for the establishment of a stable central government and oppose with determination any forces that might come in the way of such consummation," (quoted in Singh 1974:309).

It was fitting that Maharaja Ganga Singh's son acted as he did at a crucial stage in Indian history Thirty years earlier, Ganga Singh had so *impressed everybody with his statesmanship at the Imperial War Con*ference and the Imperial War Cabinet meetings in London in 1917, that Austen Chamberlain, the then Secretary of State for India, had asked him to write a Minute on Indian issues. In response, during his stop-over at Rome enroute to India, the Maharaja had prepared a note and on 15 May, 1917 forwarded it to Chamberlain. (This was to become widely known as the 'Rome Note').

In it Maharaja Ganga Singh had stressed a four-point programme, namely "...the announcement at the earliest possible opportunity that the ultimate objective of British rule in India was the grant of self-government within the empire; secondly, further liberal reforms in the constitution and functioning of the provincial legislative councils as well as the Imperial Legislative Councils; thirdly, the grant of greater autonomy to the Government of India and the provincial councils and lastly, the establishment of a Council of Princes for dealing with matters concerning the British Government and the Indian States" (ibid·211)

Maharaja Ganga Singh's stand regarding self-government for India, was, in the view of his eldest grandson, "... startling for both, the leaders of the Indian freedom struggle who never expected such a strong stand from an Indian ruling prince as also for the supporters of the empire who hoped that an Indian prince at least would never so emphatically stand for self-government in India. Even the nationalist press of the day hailed it as the dawn of a new era." Decades later, Karni Singh's own research for his Ph D convinced him that the "historic pronouncement of British government of September 20, 1917 which changed the course of Indian political evolution was not only anticipated in the Maharaja's minute but was indirectly traceable to it," (ibid·275).

For Maharaja Ganga Singh there was nothing incongruous in an Indian prince, who offered allegiance to the Empire, demanding self-government for India. As Karni Singh analysed in later years (ibid:276-277), there had been three loyalties that had constantly and simultaneously worked in his grandfather. One was his loyalty to the Crown which had almost acquired a religious sanctity with him, because the Bikaner ruler held that "the treaties which were entered into with the British Government as a result of the peculiar circumstances of the time, were plighted words which must be respected".

Another was his loyalty to his mother country, and Maharaja Ganga Singh sincerely believed in India attaining its full political stature. "...He, as one belonging to the princely order, made it very clear that the Indian princes were the sons of the soil."

And yet a third was Maharaja Ganga Singh's absolute loyalty to his State and his subjects. This love of country, loyalty to one's land of birth and people, and belief in doing both one's duty and honouring a pledged word, he had bequeathed to his son and grandson.

In his turn, Sadul Singh, during the years leading up to Indian independence, played a vital role in the Chamber of Princes (the *Narendra Mandal*). (This too was rather appropriate; for his father had been a key figure as far as the concept, establishment and functioning of the Chamber of Princes was concerned. In fact, in 1921, when the Chamber was first set up, Ganga Singh had been chosen as its first Chancellor. He held that office for the next five years between 1921-1926, and remained exceedingly important to it for the rest of his life). Besides his work in the Chamber of Princes, Sadul Singh also played a decisive role in various other negotiations between the Indian rulers and the British Government. All of these his older son would document in full in his Ph.D. thesis (Singh 1974:281-348), in subsequent years.

While other events were taking their course and the nationalist leaders of British India were making every effort towards India's "tryst with destiny", the Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes appointed Maharaja Sadul Singh the chairman of a committee of rulers to formulate proposals and recommendations for more efficient administration in the princely Indian States in 1944. This 'Bikaner Committee' made certain valuable recommendations Later, in a speech to the Informal Princes Standing Committee in September 1945, Sadul Singh stressed that before very long the Princes would be faced with the issue of how the

India and Pakistan.

"...Lord Wavell [then Viceroy] had lost the confidence of both the Congress in India and Attlee [the then British Prime Minister] in England who over-ruled *him by ordering the establishment of the Interim* Government without delay and it was sworn in on September 2, 1946", noted Karni Singh. "The Constituent Assembly began functioning from December 9, 1946. The Standing Committee of the Chamber of Princes having, by its statement of June 10, 1946 agreed that the Cabinet plan offered a fair basis for negotiations both as to the representation of the States in the Constituent Assembly and as to their ultimate position in the Union, set up a States Negotiation Committee for the purpose," (ibid:303).

In February 1947, Attlee announced in the British House of Commons that transfer of power to a responsible Indian Government would be made by June 1948. A month later, in March 1947, Lord Mountbatten arrived in India and took office as Viceroy. He was to be the country's last British Viceroy. Soon afterwards, Karni Singh's father made his historic walkout that would influence the shaping of contemporary history.

As Karni Singh worded it, "During the meetings of the Princes Standing Committee held in Bombay in April, 1947 the agreements arrived at by the two negotiating committees (the States Negotiating Committee and its counterpart set up by the Constituent Assembly) were taken up for ratification and approved. However, a difference of opinion arose between the Chancellor [of the Chamber of Princes, Nawab Hamidullah Khan of Bhopal] and the Maharaja [Sadul Singh] over the time when the States should join the Constituent Assembly. The Chancellor and the majority of the princes were in favour of the States entering the Constituent Assembly at a stage when the Union Constitution was being framed, whereas Maharaja Sadul Singh and his group were in favour of joining immediately. Finding that it was not possible for him to make the princes realise the gravity of the problem, the Maharaja staged his historic walk-out leaving a note for the Chancellor wherein ... he stated that his views on the problems then facing the rulers and the country at large were totally different from those of the Chancellor and the majority of the Standing Committee, and neither could he remain silent nor did he wish to speak anymore on his point of view which he had stressed many a time before Their Highnesses".

"The Maharaja issued an appeal to his brother princes the same day stressing that the only safe policy for the States was to work for the creation of as large a section of India as possible which would safeguard both the States and British India in the vacuum that would be created on the withdrawal of the British and which would maintain peace, order and good government and prevent civil strife...He, therefore, urged that the Princes should rise to the occasion and be hailed as co-architects of India's Independence and greatness."

"...This historic walk-out by the Maharaja broke 'Bhopal's game' of evolving a third force and the action was not only acclaimed by all sections of the press but was also eulogized by eminent British Indian leaders," (ibid:304-305).

According to his fond son, "Guided by the most patriotic of motives Maharaja Sadul Singh kept up his own plighted word of seeing India attain Independence as also provided the much needed courage to his wavering brother princes" (ibid:306). As a direct consequence, on April 28, 1947, Bikaner's representative, K.N. Panikkar, took his seat in the Constituent Assembly.

Meanwhile, "The gloomy prospect of partition stared India in the face If the States chose to adopt a path other than that of cooperation following Attlee's announcement of February 20, 1947 regarding the lapse of paramountcy, the dangerous possibility of Balkanisation indeed existed," (ibid:308). Thus, when in July 1947 Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Minister incharge of the newly created States Department, appealed to the Indian rulers to hand over matters regarding defence, foreign affairs and communications to the interim government, retaining other departments themselves, Maharaja Sadul Singh welcomed the motion and urged his brother-princes to support the step.

"The task of carrying out negotiations with the princes was entrusted to Lord Mountbatten who was the Crown representative. The Viceroy summoned a full meeting of the Chamber of Princes on July 25, 1947," noted Karni Singh, who was present at this meeting as a spectator. "The Viceroy, who was looking handsome in his naval uniform, made out a strong case for the States acceding to the appropriate Dominion [i.e. Indian or Pakistan] in regard to the three subjects, assuring them at the same time that this would involve no financial liability and that there would be no further encroachment on their internal sovereignty The Viceroy's persuasions succeeded and a majority of the princes signed the

Instrument of Accession, Maharaja Sadul Singh being the first to do so." (ibid:310)

"A Standstill Agreement which provided for the continuance, for the time being, of all subsisting agreements & administrative agreements in matters of common concern to the State and the Dominion of India was also signed about the same time" (ibid:311).

In the interim, with the imminent partition of the land into two separate countries, arose a threat for Bikaner! It seemed that the Ferozepore Headworks (located in the Punjab), from where water supply to the Gang Canal was controlled would be awarded to Pakistan. If this came to pass while Bikaner remained in India, there was a possibility that the interests of Bikaner may have been 'prejudicially affected'. In other words, the area could once again lapse into its pre-Canal state and revert to being a desertland.

At this stage also, Maharaja Sadul Singh once again played a crucial role in ensuring that the Ferozepore Headworks stayed in independent India, instead of going to Pakistan. To achieve this he even took recourse to his personal friendship with the Viceroy.

Karni Singh documented how, ".. when it became known through private sources that the Muslim League was likely to put forward claims for the control of regulation of waters from the Ferozepore Headworks, the Prime Minister of Bikaner addressed a letter to Sardar Patel .. He also added that over one thousand square miles of Bikaner territory was irrigated by the Sutlej Valley Canals and if the Muslim League's claims were accepted, the interests of the State would very much suffer. He, therefore, urged upon the Sardar both as the Minister incharge of the States Department as also Member of the High Council of Partition, to ensure that the Ferozepore Headworks were entirely controlled by India. The Maharaja also sent telegrams to the Viceroy, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel on July 7, 1947, requesting that in the arrangements that were being made, it might be ensured that the interests of Bikaner State were not interfered with," (ibid.312-313).

Sardar Patel, in his reply by telegram and letter dated the same day, assured Maharaja Sadul Singh that appropriate steps were being taken. Shortly afterwards, at the suggestion of the Viceroy, on July 18, the Maharaja sent a telegram to the President, Punjab Boundary Commission, Lahore, asking for an opportunity for the Bikaner State to present its case. Rai Bahadur Lala Kanwar Sain, Chief Engineer Irrigation,

Bikaner, and Sir Bakshi Tek Chand (the name by which Sir Tek Chand Bakshi, retired Judge Lahore High Court and one of Lahore's leading legal luminaries was better known), were deputed to present the Bikaner case. Furthermore, on July 25, 1947 a memorandum was presented to the Punjab Boundary Commission.

Events were moving rapidly at this stage. To cite Karni Singh again, on August 10, 1947 upon "...news reaching the Maharaja that the Boundary Commission was likely to award Ferozepore Tehsil to Western Punjab [Pakistan], the Maharaja again telegraphed the Viceroy stressing the importance of retaining the Headworks at Ferozepore in India as the economic life of the State depended entirely upon it urging that his Prime Minister and Chief Engineer Irrigation, might be afforded an opportunity to place facts before the Viceroy. It must be said to the credit of Lord Mountbatten especially, and to others concerned as well, that the efforts of Bikaner were finally crowned with success and a just cause upheld. Ferozepore remained in India," (ibid:313-314).

Several decades later, Paul Ramsay Brown who, accompanied by his wife, had come to Bikaner towards the end of 1935 and worked in the Bikaner railways for the state till 1949 when Bikaner merged with India, recalled the episode afresh in a letter to Maharaja Sadul Singh's granddaughter, Rajyashree Kumari. The latter says Ramsay Brown informed her that "...he had listened to some documentary on Radio 4 [in Britain] in which they said that Maharaja Sadul Singhji had threatened to join with Pakistan if Ferozepore was given to them. Mr. Ramsay Brown visited grandfather to wish him goodbye before leaving for UK and he recalls Maharaja Sadul Singh saying to him how painful it is to give up one's birthright and heritage and how lucky he was to be leaving The Maharaja then repeated that if Ferozepore had gone to Pakistan he would also have been forced to join with them."

With the euphoria of a nation gaining its independence, however, also came the traumatic partitioning of a sub-continent. Karni Singh was living at Bikaner at the time. "I was under training at that time," he recorded years afterwards, "and Maharaj Narain Singhji was deputizing for Prime Minister, and I used to sit in his office in the *Mahakma-Khas* I would drive down from my gate in my little Sunbeam Talbot, park it outside his office, and walk in. I hated crowds in those days, and the office in *Mahakma-Khas* was chockablock with office staff!"

Though Bikaner remained untainted by communal madness, it be-

came a transit-point for many who took that route to travel across the newly created national boundaries of India and Pakistan. Karni Singh recalled the period of Independence and Partition in the following words: ".. I remember how *kafilas* of ten lakhs of people moved from India to Pakistan and vice-versa, and my father's orders were that not a single person should be harmed, and the moving humanity, irrespective of caste or religion, should be given total protection. But the story on the other side of the Bikaner State, in what was then called *angrezi raj* or British India, was quite different. There was a train that came, I am given to understand by Thakur Jagmal Singhji, who was my father's ADC [Aide de Camp]— our railways extended right up to Rewari at that time — and when it entered Bikaner State it was found that there were only four people alive and four inches of thick blood in all the compartments. The people had all been butchered. It was terrible."

The younger Maharaj Kumar of Bikaner, Prince Amar Singh was still at college in Delhi at the time, witness to much of the carnage that Bikaner was mercifully spared. He recalls that when his wife and he finally flew back to Bikaner in a small plane specially sent over for that purpose by the Maharaja of Jodhpur, they ensured that an old Muslim family retainer travelled back safely to Bikaner with them.

Karni Singh also recalled another occasion, when "...some Muslims working for my father and Sardar Panikkar — who was Prime Minister — and with his beard looked like a Muslim, were on the train and they were all hidden in my father's [railway] Saloon and safely escorted until they entered Bikaner territory Father himself was not there. Mr. Panikkar, I believe, even shaved off his beard for a little while after that."

Maharaja Sadul Singh appealed to the Bikaneris not to leave their homeland and cross the border into Bahawalpur. Guaranteeing safety to all his subjects, he urged those Muslims who had already fled to return to Bikaner. He also ensured the return to such people of all the property they had abandoned when they had left their ancestral homes to cross the border into newly created Pakistan. Besides this, the Maharaja ordered that the refugees using Bikaner for their passage — Hindus and Muslims alike — were to be given every feasible assistance.

"Father even placed his own residence with its vast grounds at Sujangarh, a district town, at the disposal of the refugees," remembered Karni Singh in later years. "And when the communal holocaust began to subside in both countries, the Bikaner State could proudly look back

with satisfaction at a major humanitarian task so well done. Only one stray incident of assault had taken place. Even so, there had been no loss of life for refugees of either side who crossed the border through Bikaner. According to Kanwar Jaswant Singhji, Father was congratulated for his great work by both the leaders of India as well as the Prime Minister of Pakistan."

As normalcy began to return, in January 1948, a few months after the attainment of Indian Independence, Lord and Lady Mountbatten visited Bikaner accompanied by their daughters, Lady Patricia Brabourne and Lady Pamela Mountbatten and their son-in-law, Lord Brabourne. The occasion was the investiture of Maharaja Sadul Singh with the insignia of the Grand Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India by the Governor-General, Lord Mountbatten.

Sadul Singh and Louis Mountbatten had known each other since childhood, having first met when the former was 5 and the latter 7 years old. They met again at the coronation of King George V in 1911, and for the rest of their lives were to address each other by their nick-names of 'Hiru' (for Sadul Singh) and 'Dicky' (for Louis Mountbatten) in all informal situations. Later, both had served together on the staff of the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VIII, when he came to India in 1921-22. That was also the occasion when 'Dicky' first visited Bikaner. In the subsequent period, the two had kept in close touch and their personal friendship had grown during the viceroyalty of Mountbatten.

Reliving the occasion in his book, *The Relations of the House of Bikaner* with the Central Powers: 1465-1949, Karni Singh States that in his speech at the Investiture Durbar held at Lallgarh Palace on 15th January, 1948, Lord Mountbatten spoke of his lifelong friend in the following words:

"His Highness [Maharaja Sadul Singh] was the first ruler who realised the part which the princes could play in the future by sending representatives to the Constituent Assembly to help frame the new constitution of India. Likewise, His Highness was the first ruler to support my proposals for obtaining the accession of States to their neighbouring Dominion "

"...the statesmanship and patriotism displayed by the Maharaja of Bikaner in giving a lead in announcing his accession to the Dominion of India without a moment of doubt or suspicion cannot, therefore, be praised too highly."

Karni Singh also recalled that, "Lord Mountbatten's visit ended with

an informal imperial sand grouse shooting camp at Gajner which was greatly enjoyed by the Viceroy who himself is a fine shot."

Not long after the visit by the Mountbattens, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in Delhi on 30th January, 1948. The whole country, wrote Karni Singh, "...was suddenly plunged into unparalleled grief. As soon as the Maharaja [Sadul Singh] heard of the tragic news, he sent many telegrams of condolence, including those to Lord Mountbatten, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and others. He also immediately sent telegraphic instructions to his Master of the Household Lt. Col. Thakur Kishan Singh and to Capt. K.P.U. Menon, Foreign and Political Secretary, Government of Bikaner, who were in Delhi at the time to represent him at the funeral functions. Besides, he ordered State mourning and the holding of mass prayers at the Stadium at 4.00 p.m. on January 31, 1948 The Maharaja led the prayers personally and was visibly moved. On this occasion, the Maharaja wore a white turban, a symbol of mourning and which is only worn by the ruler in the case of the death of an elder from the immediate members of the family, and never otherwise" (ibid 322).

Throughout this time, as had been true for the preceding period and as would continue to be the case in future, Karni Singh found himself more and more busy with his administrative 'apprenticeship'. For, as Maharaj-Kumar he had, of necessity, a full schedule. This was specially true during 1948-49, when Maharaja Sadul Singh had to go abroad Regular Council Meetings either at the *Mahakma Khas* or at Shiv Bilas, discussions with ministers and officials, Revenue Board meetings and related activities were the order of the week. Besides these, time had to be found to meet with private individuals seeking an 'audience', or for inaugurating schools or some public building, or attending a public function.

In addition, there were numerous occasions on which Karni Singh accompanied his father to Delhi to take part in meetings. "I would sit behind my father and listen to all the discussions which took place with the leaders and Princes", he later recorded. "And I remember one time when we went to meet Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, when Father went to discuss with him the question of the Bhakra dam, as the waters were needed in Bikaner. Father also took up the matter with Sardar Patel and Mr. Gadgil. ... Then I went with Father to Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, the first Governor-General of [Independent] India, C.R. as he was called, and he also

discussed the Bhakra dam with him. As a result of these efforts, Father was assured by the Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru, that he would do everything in his power to see that the Bikaner State got its share in the Bhakra dam project."

Sometimes the young Maharaj-Kumar attended the law courts also, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the judicial system. Karni Singh well knew that if there was ever a case for capital punishment (by hanging) for murder offenses, the High Court was empowered to pass judgement. The final appeal then lay with the Maharaja. He dreaded such a case, and occasionally he used to recall with absolute clarity a scene from his boyhood when he had walked past a couple of manacled prisoners appealing to Maharaja Ganga Singh against the High Court's sentence.

"...For me as a child, it was gruesome to see these poor people, regardless of what their crime had been, and to know that one day it would devolve on me to have to give a decision," he remembered. "Even as a boy, I realised that I would be quite unfit to take a decision of life and death of another human being, and I hoped that such a responsibility would never fall on my shoulders." In the long run, Karni Singh got his wish since the eventual merger of Bikaner took away the necessity for him to ever face the situation that had caused him such trepidation since his boyhood days.

It was also in 1948 that Maharaj Kumar Karni Singh purchased his own aircraft, a Beechcraft Bonanza, for the price of Rs. 48,000 His very first solo flight in this plane turned into a nerve-racking experience, though. Having taken off, he heard a strange, whistling, noise from the door of the craft. Puzzled and not very conversant with the closing of the door of the Bonanza at this time, Karni Singh felt for the door handle To his horror the door opened. For an instant, total panic threatened to overwhelm him. Thinking fast, as a cold sweat broke on his forehead, he grabbed hold of the open door with one hand and brought the plane down to land with the other. Karni Singh soon docked over 500 flying hours on both this and the Argus Fairchild aircraft.

In the summer of 1948, even as Bikaner geared itself for elections which had been fixed for the coming September, the Maharaja left for England for medical treatment. He left his heir-apparent, the Maharaj Kumar Karni Singh in charge of the state, with the assistance of Maharani Sudarshan Kumari. To assist the young Maharaj Kumar in the

discharge of his duties, Meher Chand Mahajan was named as Advisor.

"He asked my mother and I to deputise in his place," recalled Karni Singh on a cassette. "Mr. Meher Chand Mahajan, as Advisor to Maharaja Sadul Singhji, was here and with his help and the help of the Prime Minister, who at that particular stage was Thakur Jaswant Singhji of Daudsar, I would sit down and sign all the files. And then I broke my hand playing hockey on skates. It happened to be my right hand, so then my mother was authorised to sign on my behalf. This was only for a short period, while father was in England. When he returned he took over."

Maharaja Sadul Singh was so pleased with the competence shown by his son, that on his return from Europe in September 1948, he transferred rupees one lakh from his Privy Purse amount to the account of his heir. In a letter dated September 19, 1948, he informed Karni Singh that this was "...in appreciation of the excellent manner in which you conducted the administration during my absence in Europe and also to help you with the construction of your [Karni Bhawan] house."

The Maharaja's appreciation was not unwarranted, for the "short period" during which Karni Singh had served in his father's place had held its own drama. A couple of years earlier, by the proclamation of August 31, 1946, Maharaja Sadul Singh had announced the reconstitution of the Bikaner Legislative Assembly on a more popular basis. To achieve that end, he appointed the Constitution Committe as well as the Franchise and Constituency Committee.

Karni Singh found that while the proclamation was well received by the people generally, the Bikaner Praja Parishad, the counterpart of the Indian National Congress, entertained some doubts. Inspite of that, its leaders announced in the press that they would not precipitate matters, and the working committee of the Praja Parishad and its workers' convention opted to cooperate with the Bikaner Government in the Constitution and Franchise & Constituency committees. As a result of their efforts, the Bikaner Constitution Act was promulgated in December 1947.

The 1947 Act brought in a bicameral legislature for Bikaner, and the administration, with certain reservations, was entrusted to a council responsible to the legislature. Through the Proclamation of December 4, 1947, it was further announced that the Act also contemplated the introduction of 'full responsible government' under the aegis of the Maharaja within a period of two years.

To hasten the process, Maharaja Sadul Singh issued another Proclamation on February 2, 1948, announcing his decision to establish a responsible government in April 1948 and dispensing with the interim arrangements. A month later, on March 18, 1948, he announced the formation of an Interim Coalition Ministry with Jaswant Singh of Daudsar as the Prime Minister. The coalition ministry, made up of both Congress representatives and the Maharaja's nominees on a fifty-fifty basis, replaced the Maharaja's Executive Council. It was charged with carrying on routine administration during the period pending elections. These were fixed for September 23, later that same year.

Later, describing the scenario vividly, Karni Singh was to comment, "For some time the work went smoothly. But it was noticed after some time that the dissident group in the Congress i.e , the group which did not favour the formation of the coalition ministry began to agitate against the State. In order to refute the allegations, a public meeting was called in the Sunaron-ki-Gawar at Bikaner and was addressed by K. Jaswant Singh, the Prime Minister, when other ministers including the Congress nominees were also present. The meeting, however, ended in rowdyism and the Congress ministers, instead of trying to quieten the mischievous elements and restore order, deserted the meeting."

"The agitation continued and the Congress dissidents now raised their voice for the merger of the State. The Maharaja brought these activities of the dissidents to the notice of Sardar Patel, and in view of the fact that the Bikaner State had been classified as a viable unit and also that the Maharaja was not only anxious to introduce more responsible government in the State but had actually taken steps for its implementation and the general elections were not far off, he asked the Sardar to see that the agitation was stopped forthwith and, in fact, the agitation did stop" (Singh 1974.292-293).

It was soon after this that Maharaja Sadul Singh had left for England for medical care, leaving Karni Singh as his deputy, in consultation with the Maharani and Advisor Meher Chand Mahajan.

There were problems in the coalition ministry while Maharaja Sadul Singh was away. "An instant in point," according to Karni Singh, "was the summary dismissal by a Congress minister of a Head of Department on the spot when, according to the rules, he could be removed only by the orders of the Maharaja. The Prime Minister did not agree with the Minister's action. The Congress Ministers made it a point of prestige."

Karni Singh, deputising for his father, referred the matter to the Maharaja in England and the case was ordered to be kept pending till the Maharaja's return. (The officer was subsequently reinstated following a full enquiry upon Sadul Singh's return).

A little later, in August 1948, while work was proceeding towards the elections scheduled for September 23, the State Congress Committee abruptly demanded the postponement of the forthcoming elections. As Maharaja Sadul Singh had not yet returned from England, Karni Singh apprised him about the situation.

Since the young Maharaj Kumar had "...explicit instructions from the Maharaja to ensure that the work of granting responsible government by the time stipulated must not be allowed to suffer under any circumstances, and further, as no cogent reasons were advanced for the desired postponement of the elections by the Congress," Karni Singh felt that "...he could not accede to the request to put the clock of democracy back. Being a firm believer in democracy and sharing his father's determination to see that Bikaner held its elections on time and that democratic government was ushered in as soon as possible, it was imperative that the election schedule was followed," (Singh 1974:294).

In an attempt to solve the imbroglio, pending his father's return to Bikaner, Karni Singh held long discussions with Congress leaders of Rajasthan like Hiralal Shastri (later to be the first Chief Minister of Greater Rajasthan, when that was formed — which post he would hold till January 1951), and Gokul Bhai Bhatt. In his view, "Whatever explanation the Bikaner State Congress Committee might have given for the basis of their demand, and these were later duly refuted by Maharaja Sadul Singh on his return, in a press communique, the fact remained that the Bikaner State Congress Committee wanted to gain time as it was not sure of its hold on the people..."

". The intention not to contest the elections and face a show-down was understandable particularly when the States Peoples Conference had tried to convince the world that they had complete control over public opinion in the States. Whether this claim was justified in the case of Bikaner and Jodhpur is a doubtful matter."

"...as it is, the Bikaner State Congress Committee, by its resolution of August 28, 1948, created an impasse by deciding not to participate in the general elections and also by calling upon its representatives in the coalition ministry to tender their resignations... This created an

unfortunate situation; and the Maharaja, who was constantly being kept in touch by the heir-apparent, returned to Bikaner onAugust 31, 1948. He immediately set himself to the task of resolving the tangle if he could," (ibid:294-296).

Among other things, Sadul Singh secured an appointment with Sardar Patel and went to Delhi to discuss the subject with him. Their discussion took place over lunch at the Sardar's house. As a consequence, Maharaja Sadul Singh was advised to discuss the matter further with V.P. Menon, Hiralal Shastri, Jai Narain Vyas and Gokul Bhai Bhatt, all of whom were in Delhi at the time. Eventually, the Bikaner Maharaja was advised to postpone the elections.

"The Maharaja," Karni Singh noted, "returned to Bikaner on September 6, 1948. The Congress ministers had tendered their resignations and the Maharaja had no option but to accept them, dissolve the interim ministry and postpone the elections ... At the same time, the Maharaja also announced his intention to appoint a Prime Minister from outside the State so that no one may have any genuine case for complaint and till the services of such an officer could be obtained on loan from the Government of India, ... Kanwar Jaswant Singh carried on as the Prime Minister till C.S. Venkatachar, I.C.S., former Dewan of Jodhpur, took over in October, 1948 (ibid·296-297).

Karni Singh also recalled this episode on a tape decades afterwards, along with his own part in securing the services of the new Prime Minister. As he worded it, "I was told to go to Delhi on his [Maharaja Sadul Singh's] orders. I flew down in my aeroplane and discussed with Mr. Venkatachar, who had then retired, whether he would take over as Prime Minister of Bikaner, or as Advisor. And I had lunch with Mr Venkatachar and invited him, and he said yes, he would accept the offer, and I conveyed the message to my father. ...Mr. Venkatachar then continued as Prime Minister right up to the Integration, and in fact the Private Property Settlements, in many cases, bore his signatures."

Meanwhile, concurrent with many of these happenings, the Government of India had started to integrate some of the princely Indian States. The logic given was that the people of the Indian States desired the same measure of freedom etc. as enjoyed by the people in provinces and centrally administered parts of the country. Secondly, the rulers of the smaller 'non-viable' States were not in a position to bring about the desired administrative reforms for want of resources. Consequently, it

was decided to group them into sizeable units by merging them with either the neighbouring provinces, or converting them into centrally administered areas. Very soon, this process was extended to encompass the major States too, by creating new 'viable units' through the formation of Unions of States.

"This," held Karni Singh, "was going back upon the solemn assurances given at the time the accession of the States was sought for. The tide of times had changed. The process of integration started avowedly with the consent of the princes, but a consent which circumstances did not permit them to withhold..."

"Even the eighteen States which the Government of India had at first declared as those satisfying the conditions as viable units of the Indian union and whose names were listed in the relevant schedule of the Draft Constitution placed before the Constituent Assembly, ultimately lost, their separate entity as the process of integration and merger progressed and in good time before the Constitution was adopted. Bikaner State was among these eighteen viable States," (Singh 1974:323-324).

"The process of integration began with the rulers of the Chhatisgarh and Orissa States ceding to the Dominion Government full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and powers for and in relation to the governance of their States by agreements signed on December 14, 1947 and subsequent dates," he noted. Very soon afterwards, at a conference attended by several Indian rulers and Lord Mountbatten on January 7, 1948, V.P. Menon, Secretary in the Government of India's States Department, assured the Princes present that the principle of merger would not be applied to those States which had individual representatives in the Constituent Assembly. (Bikaner being one such State).

"And yet what followed soon belied these professions," an indignant Karni Singh was to comment. "The sudden switch in the policy of the new Government of India in respect of the larger States, which had even in the draft Constitution been declared as viable units, and which could maintain their separate identity, is rather hard to explain".

Not surprisingly, therefore, when the Government of India, in a shift of stance, began to integrate the princely States, Maharaja Sadul Singh felt extremely let down, even betrayed. Carried away by the euphoria of Independence, not only had Maharaja Sadul Singh signed away his inheritance for what he perceived to be the greater good of the people of both Bikaner and India, he had also played a vital role in persuading

many of his brother-princes to follow his lead.

This role been acknowledged not only by all his contemporaries, it was to be publically reiterated, a few years after the death of Maharaja Sadul Singh, by no less a personage than the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Speaking on the occasion of the unveiling ceremony of the late Maharaja Sadul Singh's statue at Bikaner on 2nd September, 1954, the President of India was to acknowledge that,

"...When the British Government decided to leave India, they declared that after their departure all treaties and agreements between the British Crown and the Princes and States of India would cease to operate. The result was that a large part of India, comprising about 600 States, scattered all over the country, became free after the departure of the British to remain either with India or seek to retain their separate entity. It was a crucial problem on which depended the unity and the very future of India..."

"The great move for the unification of India could materialize primarily because of the goodwill and ready willingness of Princes like Maharaja Sadul Singhji to participate in Constitution making and to send their representatives to the Constituent Assembly of India. It was a difficult task, too difficult to be described in words, but for this kind of wilful cooperation, India might have remained split in several bits It redounds to the credit of the late Maharaja of Bikaner that by his bold decision he gave a correct and timely lead to other Princes. This eventually resulted in the accession of not only Bikaner but also other Princely States to India. Therefore, India is, and will remain indebted to him.When the history of that period is written, it will be recorded therein that at a time when India was faced, on the one hand, with the calamity of partition and, on the other, with the dangerous possibility of Balkanisation, Maharaja Sadul Singhji prompted by farsightedness and the most patriotic of motives stood firm like a rock and averted that possibility."

"...By placing the interests of the country before their own, the Princes played a memorable part in the process of India's unification The help which the late Maharaja Sadul Singhji gave in this connection, has been thankfully acknowledged by the great Indian leader and Minister of States at that time, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel."

When the process of integration was initiated, Maharaja Sadul could not believe that the great leaders who had brought about Indian inde-

pendence could go back on their solemn assurances within such a short period of time. According to Karni Singh, his father "...had placed his faith and trust in the word of our great leaders that they would not be interested in annexing the States. Then a sudden shift started which became a whirlwind almost when, without any apparent reason, the Government of India started shifting its stance and going in for integration of States and finishing them of."

"Rajputana too could not escape this process which was rapidly growing. Its integration was completed in four stages," Karni Singh wrote in later years (Singh 1974:325). "...The three old established major and viable States of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner, together with the ancient State of Jaisalmer, stood out till the last. The Ministry of States therefore, soon initiated negotiations for the merger of these major and viable States for the formation of a Greater Rajasthan Union. The negotiations were protracted, several meetings took place jointly and several between the three rulers and V.P. Menon, representative of the Ministry of States, at Delhi, Bikaner, Jaipur and Jodhpur. ... [Karni Singh] was present at most of these meetings. It soon became apparent that the merger was inevitable and in the interests of the people of the States and the greater good of the country these four rulers agreed to form the greater Rajasthan union. On January 14, 1949 Sardar Patel announced at a public meeting at Udaipur that the rulers of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner had agreed in principle to integration," (ibid:326)

The note Sadul Singh made in his own handwriting in a file which his son preserved, clearly expressed his bewilderment and anguish at the shape the future was taking. 'Why this sudden change?' Maharaja Sadul Singh queried. His heir recalled that, "A big meeting was held in Bikaner at which the people said they didn't want to merge and then the whole thing was railroaded through. My father felt let down, ...and he died soon after. It was the fact that assurances had been given and that they went back on their word"

In spite of the prevalent public feeling, however, integration became a reality for Bikaner. On April 7, 1949, Bikaner State was formally integrated into the Greater Rajasthan Union — the United State of Rajasthan, and the administration of Bikaner was handed over to the new Government of Rajasthan. A cash balance of Rs. 4.87 crores, the highest amount amongst all the States of erstwhile Rajputana, was transferred to the new Government. In addition to this, all the assets of the Bikaner State Railway

were also made over. The transfer included about nine crore rupees worth of railway line and rolling stock to the central Government.

The Instruments of Merger and the Covenants, which transferred power from the ruler, also detailed the rights, privileges, and so forth that had been fixed for them and their successors. In addition, these provided for the retention of their private properties by the princes, and guaranteed to them privy purses and succession to their *gaddis*.

As Karni Singh recalled afterwards, "Steps were taken to define the private properties of the rulers as distinct from those of the States, and settlements were arrived at in a spirit of compromise with due regard to the safeguarding of public interests. In the case of Bikaner, a list of the private properties so agreed upon to be retained by the Maharaja was received from the States Ministry by their letter dated February 17, 1949 to Maharaja Sadul Singh. As Bikaner was a large and viable unit, the Maharaja's Privy Purse was fixed at 17 lakhs and 10 lakhs for his successors."

In his book *The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers: 1465-1949*, Karni Singh stated in a forthright manner that, "In order to appreciate this second phase of wiping off the entity of Indian States in the name of unification of India it is necessary to .. examine the workings of the minds of those at the helm of affairs in the States Department. When Sardar Patel was sceptical about the rulers of the Indian States agreeing to accede to the Indian Union and expressed his doubts about the same to V.P. Menon, he at once pointed out that the rulers could not refuse to accede. Menon's contention was that the lapse of paramountcy was a blessing in disguise for India because with it ended the many privileges which the princes enjoyed under the various treaties and engagements and which carried with them certain obligations which they would have been obliged to honour if paramountcy had been transferred to them. According to him they were now free He even told the Sardar that in case of political or communal agitation in the States or in case of the people rising up and demanding freedom or to join India or in case of popular agitation beginning to threaten the rule and even the lives of the rulers, who else would they have to look up to for protection other than the Indian Government. He said that it was now their turn to say how the princes behaved. And the Sardar was not slow to catch the point, which in plainer words meant that any of these conditions could be created to achieve the desired end. And instances are

not wanting;..."

"...Thus, when soon after the States had acceded to the Indian Union, in respect of the three subjects of common concern, namely, Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Communications, the curtain was lifted for the second act of complete merger of over five hundred States. A lurking doubt was created in the minds of the people if the builders of free India were completely honest with the rulers and whether they did not actually negotiate accession as a first step with mental reservations to bring about total integration a little later on. The argument that the smaller States could not have a high administrative efficiency as required by the people after Independence, and hence that there should be a move to merge the smaller States into groups, or with the adjoining provinces, or into centrally administered areas, was understandable. In fact, Maharaja Sadul Singh had advocated the formation of sizeable units of States much earlier so that they could keep themselves abreast with administrative reforms... The question of the merger of larger viable units, however, was a different matter."

"The two issues of accession and merger should never be confused Accession of the States meant bringing into India under one flag nearly 1/3rd more of India at a time when a third force was possible and the Centre was somewhat weak due to transfer of power from British to Indian hands and due to the upheaval caused by partition. Maharaja Sadul Singh's strong lead to bring about accession was thus a most patriotic move. The merger issue, however, was an entirely different proposition as this envisaged boundary changes within the country with the head of State from a ruler changing over to a life-Rajpramukh. In fact the question of monarchical governments continuing as constitutional heads had been accepted in principle subject to the people's approval by all the Freedom fighter leaders including Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel," (Singh 1974:333-335).

With integration, a major chapter closed on the long history of Bikaner It was, indeed, an end of an era; of five centuries of Rathore rule and the peaceful transfer of power from their hands to a young, vigorous 20th century nation-state. While Karni Singh, with the supreme confidence of youth coupled with feelings of patriotism, attempted his transition to his new role, the ailing Maharaja Sadul Singh did not have long to live. He was to pass away the very next year.

Nearly a quarter of a century later Karni Singh would comment that,

"While looking back at the question of merger of the States our criticism is not to the merger of the States themselves, but to the way in which it was brought about after assurances to the contrary given *ad lib* by the top-most leaders of India." Karni Singh also clarified that while personally he had "...been an ardent supporter of the merger system and the ushering in of democratic institutions in the Indian States, nevertheless, the forcing of merger on the people of the States without taking their opinion was hardly democratic. It would have been much better had the Government of India at the time of the accession of the States to the Indian Union declared their policy that the ultimate merger of the States would be their goal, immediately or in progressive stages," (Singh 1974:341).

In fact, a few months after the integration of the States, when Maharaja Sadul Singh returned to Bikaner from England and proceeded towards the temple of Sri Lakshminarayan (locally also referred to as the temple of Lakshminathji), he received a tumultuous public welcome Karni Singh, who was seated besides his father in the car, later described it as "a reception, the like of which is not often come across The normal half hour run took five hours because the enthusiasm and love of the people was so great."

1949 was also the year that Karni Singh travelled to Europe. He left India in May, a month after Bikaner merged into Rajasthan, and returned in July. Karni Singh was accompanied by his wife, the Yuvrani, as well as his brother and sister-in-law. Lt. Col. Thakur Bharat Singh, in the capacity of *'Sardar-in-Waiting' to the heir-apparent and Yuvrani, and* Capt. Kanwar Anand Singh, as secretary to the heir-apparent, also accompanied the Bikaner brothers. Also included in the party were Khwas Ramjiwan and Mukana. The trip took in England, France, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden. Besides these countries, enroute the party also visited Egypt.

By the beginning of 1950, Maharaja Sadul Singh's health was once again causing concern. The Maharaja had suffered his first heart attack when he was only thirty-six. Though over-weight, he was an extremely active man, who played polo, tennis, squash and all types of games, and enjoyed skating. Even after his heart attack, he continued to lead a fairly active life. Karni Singh heartily approved of the fact that his father smoked very little, drank within limits and followed a healthy routine, under the overall treatment of Dr. Weingarten, a German Jew, who was

continuing as the Principal Medical Officer in Bikaner.

In 1948, Maharaja Sadul Singh suffered another heart-attack at Bombay, this time a massive one, and later proceeded to England for medical treatment. Karni Singh, who had had a rather heated discussion with his father only a day or so before the heart-attack, was stricken with remorse when he learnt of his father's illness. In 1949, Sadul Singh had once again gone to England for a couple of months for medical attention.

In May the following year, Maharaja Sadul Singh left for medical treatment in England once again. "He had chartered a full Constellation", remembered his heir, "and he didn't want me to come to the airport to see him off, and we were all so upset that I insisted on going with him"

At Bombay airport, Karni Singh, watched as the ailing ruler was carried up in a chair to his special Air India Constellation plane, the *Maratha Princess*. Suddenly a dreadful premonition seized the Maharaj Kumar Something told him that it was possible he would never see his father back in Bikaner again. Masking his inner feelings, he bid farewell and watched as the plane rose in the air, carrying the 22nd Maharaja of Bikaner across the seas.

Sometime later, a message was received from London to say that, in the process of arrival, many aeroplanes had been stacked over London Airport, awaiting clearance to land. The Maharaja's flight had to circle for nearly two hours in rough and bumpy conditions. As a result, his heart had been affected, and when he landed and was being taken in the car, Maharaja Sadul Singh suffered a massive heart arrest enroute. Dr. Weingarten, who had accompanied the ruler as his medical officer, immediately rendered treatment at a roadside restaurant and after he had revived sufficiently the travellers carried on to the Savoy Hotel, where the Maharaja was to stay.

Fortunately, Maharaja Sadul Singh recovered from this attack. However, as Dr Weingarten informed the Maharaj Kumars Karni Singh and Amar Singh on his return to Bikaner some time later, the Maharaja remained in extremely poor health Worried about his father's health, Prince Karni Singh flew to London in June 1950 for a ten day visit, with Thakur Anand Singh in attendance.

Having checked in at the Grosvenor Hotel in Hyde Park at London, Karni Singh went to call on his father at the Savoy. He found Maharaja Sadul Singh resting in bed, looking extremely sick but coping bravely with

his ill-health. For the next ten days, Karni Singh spent as much time as possible with his father and then returned to India, hoping that the Maharaja's health would soon improve with adequate rest and medication

Over the next few months, as summer began to give way to autumn, the Bikaner family kept in regular touch with London. Around the third week of September, word was received from London to say that the Maharaja was seriously ill at his house at Chertsey in Surrey Maharaj Kumar Karni Singh immediately decided to fly to England to meet his father. Arrangements were made, consequently, for him and his brother to fly from Bombay to London, three to four days later. Following this, both the Maharaj Kumars proceeded to Delhi, from where they intended travelling to Bombay, enroute to London, in a couple of days time.

The blow fell in the last week of September. In the meantime, Karni Singh had received a telegram, signed by Dr. Weingarten, stating that His Highness the Maharaja Sadul Singhji was critical, and urging that the Maharaja's sons should reach London as soon as possible.

On the morning of September 26, the brothers woke up at 4 a m. to catch the flight to Bombay, from where they were to fly to London. Around 5 a.m., Thakur Bharat Singh arrived at Bikaner House, the family's Delhi residence. He brought with him the newspapers that carried, in the 'Late News' column, the news of the death of the Maharaja of Bikaner in London on September 25, 1950. Even as those present were assimilating the news, others arrived at Bikaner House bearing the same news.

Though not wholly unexpected, the news came as a terrible shock to every one. Arrangements to return to Bikaner were made immediately. While Karni Singh's Beechcraft Bonanza was used to fly some of the party, a second plane, a Dakota, was chartered for the others. Another Dakota was chartered to bring Maharaja Sadul Singh's widow, Maharani Sudarshan Kumari, who was in Bombay at the time, back to Bikaner.

Upon arriving in Bikaner, Karni Singh was caught up with arrangements to bring back the late Maharaja's body to Bikaner, so that the last rites could be administered according to customary rituals at Bikaner. Thakur Kishan Singh and Thakur Jagmal Singh flew to England to bring back the coffin of the late Maharaja.

The entire state went into mourning and messages of condolence began pouring into Bikaner, even as the priests prayed for the soul of their departed ruler. The late Maharaja's heir, Karni Singh, had already ap-

pointed Thakur Jaswant Singh of Daudsar, an erstwhile Prime Minister of Bikaner, as his Advisor, and the Thakur, with his vast knowledge and expertise, efficiently handled the entire preparations essential to the occasion.

Meanwhile, Karni Singh was informed by V.P. Menon, on behalf of the Government of India, that they would make arrangements through its High Commission at India House in Britain, to look after all the late Maharaja's property and belongings in England until the new Maharaja was in a position to settle matters.

Then followed a nerve-wracking forty-eight hours as everyone waited for the plane that was carrying back the mortal remains of Maharaja Sadul Singh. Established practice enjoined that cremation take place as soon after a death as feasible. Consequently, directly after the plane landed at Nal aerodrome the coffin was taken to the centuries old fort of the Rathores of Bikaner (which had by now begun to be referred to as *'Junagarh' or 'Old Fort'). Here, after certain ceremonies the funeral* cortege assembled.

Obsequies were followed in a certain pattern in the different States of Rajputana. In Bikaner, it was customary for the heir-apparent of the demised ruler to accompany the cortege as far as the gates of the Junagarh Fort and no further. It was with a heavy heart that Karni Singh walked with his father's bier up to the fort-gates, giving offerings of *khand* as tradition demanded

As he walked, his thoughts flew back seven years to another funeral procession that had caused equal sorrow. When Maharaja Ganga Singh had passed away, his body had been brought from Bombay by plane. The same afternoon in 1943, as the funeral procession left the fort, the Maharaja's heir, Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh, who had carried the bier *up to the gates of the fort, bid his last farewell to his father and returned* within the fort.

It had been the painful duty of Maharaj Bhairun Singh, who accompanied the bier to the royal cremation grounds at Devikund, to perform the last rites as directed by priests and light the funeral-pyre on that day in 1943 in his capacity as the next nearest relative. Now it was the turn of Karni Singh to stop at the fort gates, while his younger brother, accompanied by a huge crowd of mourning Bikaneris, walked with the cortege to its destination and lit the flames of the funeral pyre.

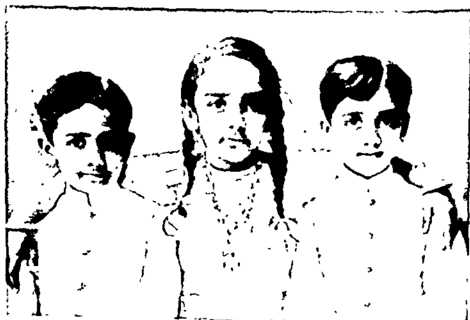
Coming within seven years of the demise of Karni Singh's strongest



KARNI SINGH AS A CHILD.



WITH HIS FAVOURITE TRICYCLE.



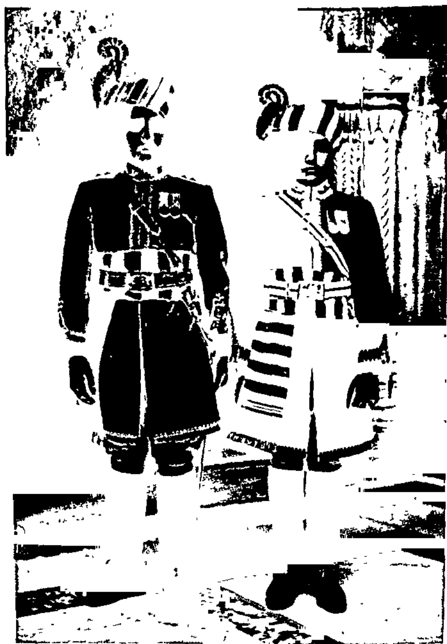
PRINCE KARNI SINGH (RIGHT) WITH HIS BROTHER
PRINCE AMAR SINGH (LEFT) AND SISTER PRINCESS SUSHIL KANWAR.



Maharaja Ganga Singhji and his grandchildren as cadets left to right: Karni Singh's sister now Maharani of Udaipur; third from left Prince Karni Singh and younger brother Prince Amar Singh.



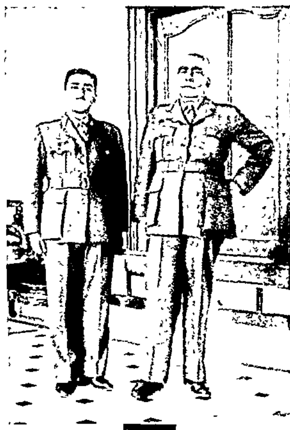
Prince Karni Singh with his elder sister seated, younger brother Prince Amar Singh and sister Princess Sushila Kumari.



PRINCE KARNI SINGH (LEFT) WITH HIS BROTHER PRINCE AMAR SINGH.



KARNI SINGH AND BROTHER AMAR SINGH WITH THEIR GOVERNESS MRS. A. M. DENT.



WITH MAHARAJ GANGA SINGH BEFORE PROCEEDING TO THE MIDDLE EAST WAR FRONT, 1941.



THE PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN ON THE OCCASION OF BETROTHAL OF MAHARAJA KUMAR KARNI SINGH ON 16TH JANUARY, 1940 IN GANGA NIWAS DURBAR HALL, BIKANER.





DURING THE WEDDING PROCESSION
WITH FATHER-IN-LAW
MAHARAWAL LAKSHMAN SINGH.

(TOP) HEIR-APPARENT KARNI SINGH'S
WEDDING PROCESSION IN 1944.



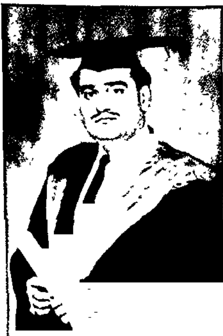
With his wife Maharaj-Kumari Sushila Kumari
at Lallgarh Palace.



DURING LIGHTER MOMENTS AT OBEROI GRAND, 1964, CALCUTTA.



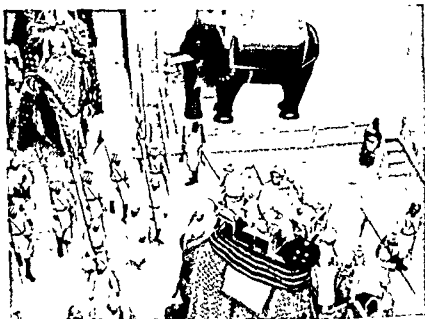
KARNI SINGH WITH HIS WIFE MAHARAJ KUMRANI SUSHILA KUMARI AND MOTHER MAHARANI SUDARSHAN KUMARI.



KARNI SINGH RECEIVES HIS PH.D. IN 1964 BY BOMBAY UNIVERSITY.



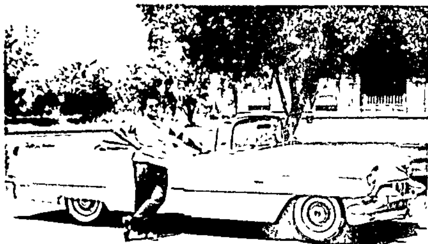
ON HOLI



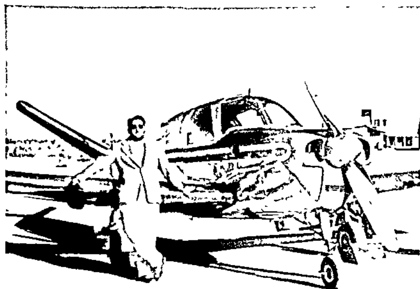
Maharaj Ganga Singh, Prince Karni Singh's grandfather during the Dussehra procession in Bikaner 1940



During the wedding of Prince Karni Singh's elder sister Princess Sushil Kanwar with Heir-Apparent of Udaipur.



With his favourite car the Cadillac in 1956.
Karni Singh was very fond of fast cars in his younger days.



Maharaja Karni Singhji photographed at Nal Airfield Bikaner with his bonanza Air Craft which he used to fly himself.
He held a Commercial Pilot's Licence and used to fly his own aeroplane for his journies to Delhi, Bombay, Udaipur, Dungarpur



WITH HON'BLE
SRI LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI
THEN RAILWAY MINISTER
AT LALLGARH PALACE.



WITH DR. S. RADHAKRISHNAN IN 1961
AT RASHRAPATI BHAWAN
AFTER RECEIVING THE ARJUNA AWARD.
PRINCE KARNI SINGH WAS ONE
OF THE 1ST RECIPIENTS.



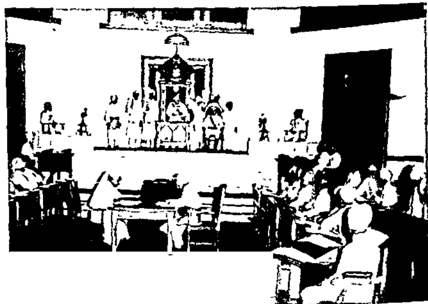
AT RASHTRAPATI BHAWAN
CALLING ON THE THEN
PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD.



Dr. Rajendra Prasad unveiling statue of Maharaja Sadul Singhji after independence, the statue was exacted by funds collected by the people of Bikaner in fond memory of their Maharaja.



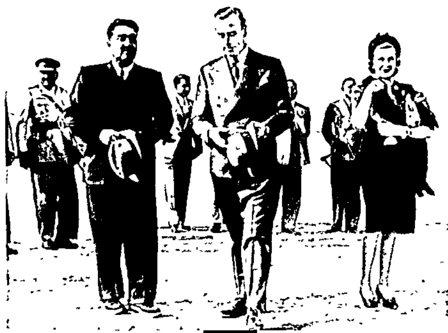
Prince Karni Singh with Maharaj Sadul Singhji after returning from a visit to LakshmiNath Temple.



THE BIKANER LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN SESSION 1948.
SHRI MEGHRAJJI, ON 8TH JANUARYY, 1970.
FATEH SINGH RAO GAEKWAD OF BARODA AND MAHARAJA OF DHARANGHDRA



DR. KARNI SINGH WITH INDIRA GANDHI,
FATEH SINGH RAO GAEKWAD OF BARODA
AND MAHARAJA OF DHARANGADHRA SHRIJI MEGHRAJJI,
ON 8TH JANUARY 1970.



In 1948. during the visit of
Lord and Lady Mountbatten of Burma to confer the
title of GSCI on Maharaja Sadul Singh.



With Jacqueline Onassis Kenedy



AT A BANQUET GIVEN IN THE DURBAR HALL IN HONOUR OF THE VISIT OF LORD AND LADY MOUNTBATTEN. LEFT TO RIGHT: LORD BRABOUNI (HIS WIFE AND LORD MOUNTBATTEN'S DAUGHTER), MAHARAJA SADUL SINGHJI, EDWINA MOUNTBATTEN, HEIR-APPARENT KARNI SINGHJI, PAMELA MOUNTBATTEN.



WITH MAHARAJA GAJ SINGH OF JODHPUR AND MOTHER RAJMATA KRISHNA KUMARI AT UMAID BHAWAN PALACE.

childhood anchor, his grandfather, he felt the emotional trauma of his father's death acutely. He recalled that around 1946, Maharaja Sadul Singh had mentioned that an astrologer had told him he would live for another 22 years. The Maharaja had assured his eldest son that for the next 22 years the two of them could work together and do a lot of good work for the State. Now the memory of that conversation was almost like a physical pain. (Thirty years further on, Karni Singh admitted on a cassette that "I often think of that conversation and the very thought of it makes me sad".)

According to tradition, Karni Singh, as the eldest son and heir of Maharaja Sadul Singh, was deemed the successor to the *gaddi* of Bikaner as its 23rd ruler immediately upon the death of his father, but the coronation rites were conducted on October 7, 1950. The time honoured custom in Bikaner had been for the succession to be announced to the beating of drums in the town square. It was also tradition to hold twelve days of official mourning. Following which, on the thirteenth day the *Raj Tilak* (anointment and coronation) of the new ruler would be performed and he would ascend the *gaddi* (throne) of his ancestors. A silver coin bearing the name of the new ruler used to be struck on the occasion.

Keeping in mind the traditional importance of the clan in Rajput society and polity, and in a custom that harked back several hundred years to when the then ruler, the Rao, was *primus inter pares* amongst his clans-people, the installation was always preceded by an 'invitation' to ascend the throne from certain leading nobles. A similar custom, with minor variations, was common to most of the other Rajput Princely States.

In the case of Bikaner, it was the traditional role of the Raja of Mahajan, the Raja of Bidasar, the Rao of Bhukurga and the Rao of Rawatsar to ask the new ruler to accept the *gaddi* These four nobles, related by ties of kinship, were acknowledged as the pillars of the state. After this formality came the ritual recognition from the group that had been dominant among the earlier inhabitants of the area that had formed Rao Bika's Bikaner — the Jats belonging to the Godara clan.

In commemoration of the fact that the land had once 'belonged' to the Godara Jats, it fell to their lot for one of their descendants to place the *Raj Tilak* — the auspicious mark of coronation — on the forehead of the new ruler. Custom decreed that the appointed Jat, replicating the act performed by his long-ago ancestor, nicked his finger and used a drop of

his own blood in place of the more usual vermillion to apply this mark.

As the time for the new Maharaja's coronation approached, Karni Singh was faced with a dilemma. This he voiced to Thakur General Jeoraj Singh of Sandwa and other senior nobles of Bikaner. The new Maharaja felt that he could not, in all honesty, sit on the ancestral sandalwood throne of the Rathores because, as a consequence of the integration and merger of States, he was neither a ruler in the full sense of the word, nor did he occupy sovereignty.

The sandalwood throne of Bikaner formed a direct link with the long-gone kingdom of Kanauj and the Rathore forebears who had wrested a living from the desertlands of Rajasthan. The throne had been occupied by many a great ruler of Bikaner. It was one of the precious heirlooms promised to Rao Bika, the founder of Bikaner, by his father, Rao Jodha, as part of the former's patrimony, and later brought by him to Bikaner from Jodhpur by force after a battle with the brother who had inherited Jodhpur and obdurately refused to part with the cherished symbols.

Karni Singh's arguments were, however, overruled by all the senior nobles They unequivocally asserted that the coronation ceremony of their new Maharaja had to be as per convention, and that as their 23rd ruler, Karni Singhji had to ascend the traditional sandalwood throne of the Rathores of Bikaner.

Following appropriate rituals, therefore, Prince Karni Singh formally ascended the throne of Bikaner on October 7, the thirteenth day after the demise of the 22nd Maharaja. It was a sombre occasion for him personally, for he still mourned the loss of his father.

Dressed in a white *safa*, coat and breeches, Karni Singh left the Lallgarh Palace in the morning for the Junagarh fort. Ceremonial *naubat* drums were beaten as the new ruler arrived at the Phool-Mahal-ri-Sal of the fort; the beat being picked up at the Lakshminarayan temple. Simultaneously, the sound of the *naubats* rang out in Deshnoke too.

Karni Singh then proceeded to the Sampara Kotri, where he changed into traditional Rathore Rajput clothes, complete with heirloom sword, dagger and various jewels, for the ensuing rituals, including that of *Chhayadan* and ceremonial anointment. After this, attended by regalia bearers, the anointed Maharaja left for the Karan Mahal, within the fort, where he was greeted by the firing of a guns salute.

At long last, Karni Singh finally entered Karan Mahal for his coronation ceremony. As the ceremony progressed, he was, according to past

custom, asked by the four major chiefs of Bikaner to sit on the throne. With a silent prayer and extreme personal reservations, Karni Singh bowed to the venerated throne of the Rathores thrice, according to custom, and then took his place upon it as the 23rd Maharaja of Bikaner.

As the ceremonial continued, with the new Maharaja seated on the throne and the priests intoning the age-old sacred liturgy, Karni Singh recalled how the British had always objected to the word 'throne' in connection with the Indian rulers, but Maharaja Ganga Singh always insisted that rulers ascended a 'throne', and 'throne' it had been for the House of Bikaner all through the 20th century.

At the conclusion of the *raj tilak* ceremony, Karni Singh folded his hands in obeisance to the throne. Then and there, the newly crowned Maharaja also vowed to himself that this would be the first and last time that he ever sat on the famous sandalwood throne of the Rathores. (Unless, he told himself, the situation was ever reversed).

He kept his word for the rest of his life, refusing even to pose on that specific throne for purposes of photography, offering persistent photo-journalists a choice of photographing him seated on one of the many other thrones in the possession of the Bikaner royal family, if they so desired! The heirloom throne now occupies a place of prestige in the museum that has been set-up within the fort.

On the day of his enthronement and *raj tilak*, Maharaja Karni Singh held formal court — the durbar — for the first time. This was also to be the only such formal durbar, with all the appropriate accoutrements and associated paraphernalia, that the 23rd Maharaja of Bikaner would ever hold. In his eyes, the durbar was a concept directly linked to the traditional State and the notion of rulership. Since both had altered their form with the integration of Bikaner with India, the new Maharaja thought it best to end the custom, which had become, in the new circumstances, somewhat archaic.

The durbar was a solemn occasion, entailing the ruler receiving homage (in the form of *nazar*) from all the prominent people of the land in a ceremonious manner. It was obligatory to conform to the established dress-code on this occasion, and the nobles looked particularly dashing with a traditional turban as headgear and a cummerbund round the waist. The sheathed swords in their richly decorated scabbards, worn by those of the courtiers who enjoyed the privilege of wearing a sword, added further mystique, colour and romance to the gathering

Those attending the durbars included the royal family, chiefs and nobles, the *dewan* or Prime Minister and other ministers, heads of departments, their assistants and other state officers, as well as prominent merchants and business heads. Besides these, some of the artisans and others who served the court would also be present at durbars.

Durbars had always been a grand affair in almost all the Indian princely States. The King-Emperors of Great Britain and the British Empire had also taken to the custom, and Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner had been among the prominent invitees to the Jubilee of George V and the Coronation Durbar of King George VI in Britain. In Bikaner, it was traditional to also hold a durbar on the birth anniversary of the ruler

Since the birthdays of both Maharaja Ganga Singh and his successor, Maharaja Sadul Singh, fell in autumn, coinciding, as per the Indian calendar, with the festive season of Dussehra, these birthday anniversary durbars were always resplendent events. On the occasion of Maharaja Ganga Singh's birthday, besides the durbar, a Review of the Bikaner State Forces would also be held. This too would be attended by all his family members and courtiers

Karni Singh had participated in many such durbars and processions since his grandfather's golden jubilee year. As he received *nazar* from assembled relatives, courtiers, nobles and others on October 7, 1950, his mind recalled vividly many a past durbar procession of Bikaner. It was custom for the ruler to be the last to enter the Durbar Hall Preceding him would be his nearest kin. Thus, during the reign of his father, Maharaja Sadul Singh, it was Karni Singh himself who had walked immediately ahead of the ruler in his capacity as the heir to the *gaddi*, with his brother, Prince Amar Singh, in his turn immediately in front. The next nearest relatives used to be positioned ahead of Prince Amar Singh, and they, in turn, were preceded by other relatives, nobles and officers, in keeping with the rules of protocol. Then, as now, the *chobdar* (herald) walked right at the front of the procession, heralding the arrival of the Maharaja into the Durbar Hall.

Within the Durbar Hall, once all the members of the ruling family, the sardars, thakurs, army commanders, other nobility, court officials, leading merchants —*seths* and *sahukars*, and others had assembled systematically, according to their warrant of precedence, Karni Singh knew they would await their turn to pay homage to the ruler. He was only too familiar with the ritual whereby the *chobdar* acting as 'Master of Ceremonies' called

out the names as per the established conventions, and the person, or class of persons, summoned would go up to the Maharaja to pay allegiance and present *nazar*. Even masons, artisans, and others paid their respects to the ruler in a prescribed manner.

For as long as Karni Singh could remember, during his grandfather's reign it was Darbari Mahesh Dan to whom belonged the task of announcing the names at the durbars. As the ruler's heir, Maharaj Kumar Sadul Singh would do the first *nazar*, then would follow the rest of the family members and courtiers.

Once the princes Karni Singh and Amar Singh were deemed old enough to attend the durbar, which they had done for the first time in 1937 on the occasion of Maharaja Ganga Singh's golden jubilee durbar, Karni Singh had performed the *nazar* after his father, to be followed by his younger brother. The others followed after them, according to their ranks and titles. After the demise of Maharaja Ganga Singh and the accession of Maharaja Sadul Singh, it became the task of his eldest son, Karni Singh, to offer the first *nazar*, to be followed by his younger brother and then all the others as per warrant of precedence. Henceforth, however, his would be the role of accepting and not presenting *nazars*.

Once the durbar had concluded, other ceremonies and rites associated with the occasion were conducted at the Har Mandir, Sur Mandir, Hazur Steps, Devidwara, Dalel Niwas and other places. Finally, emotionally drained, and barely aware of the cheering crowds which had gathered to view the different ceremonies, the new Maharaja of Bikaner returned to Lallgarh Palace.

His succession as the new Maharaja of Bikaner was formally recognized by the President of the Republic of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, through a letter dated October 18, 1950.

The period following Karni Singh taking over the titles and estates of his father, was not easy for him. In part this was due to the prevalent custom of the time whereby the sons of the Maharaja did not participate in the affairs of State on a day-to-day basis, and consequently remained unfamiliar with several aspects.

Much the same situation had been faced by Sadul Singh when Maharaja Ganga Singh died. In addition to this, Karni Singh had been away at college for part of his father's reign, and though he had shouldered State responsibility on several occasions and acted for his father during the turbulent period of transition in 1948-49, he was not fully cognisant with

all the late Maharaja's State-related, business and family matters. He once told a internationally known television interviewer, "I think we had about eighteen houses [when I became Maharaja], counting one in England in Chertsey (Surrey) and one in Chantilly in France."

The new Maharaja of Bikaner was only 26. With the demise of Maharaja Sadul Singh, the privy purse for Bikaner had been immediately reduced from Rs. 17 lakhs to Rs. 10 lakhs, as per the provisions of the Merger Agreement. The demise of Maharaja Sadul Singh of Bikaner was amongst the first instances of a Maharaja dying after integration, and almost at once his heir had to organise affairs in order to manage on a drastically different annual privy purse.

Furthermore, the 22nd ruler of Bikaner had been a keen builder, and in the seven short years of his reign he had begun construction of several public buildings at Bikaner, Gajner, Lallgarh and Bombay. Many of these were incomplete when he died. Straightening his financial position and completing various works begun by his late father became, as a result, one of the first tasks for Maharaja Karni Singh. As Karni Singh himself put it, "...when Maharaja Sadul Singh passed away it came as a terrible blow and all of a sudden all the responsibilities came on my shoulders."

Maharaja Karni Singh, consequently, appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of his younger brother, Prince Amar Singh. The prince, now bearing the title of 'Maharaj' to signify that he was the brother of the ruler, in place of his previous title of 'Maharaj Kumar' which had identified him as the son of a ruler, was assisted by Thakur Jaswant Singh of Daudsar as Adviser. In addition, the committee was aided by experienced and capable officers. Among them were Thakur Kishan Singh, Chandra Singh and Rajgopal (who had been Private Secretary to the late Maharaja Sadul Singh).

With the capable assistance of this committee, the new Maharaja was able to sort out various problems, deal with matters relating to taxes and investments, sell off property and houses in England and France and retrench many of the extra staff. The latter were compensated by settling money on them in the form of compounded pensions along with three to five years of pay in a lump sum.

Payment of such compounded pensions and gratuities to staff and servitors ran into several millions of rupees. While on the one hand it enabled the beneficiaries to invest these lump sums of moneys and live a relatively more secure life than if they had depended on a monthly

pension, it also freed the Maharaja and his successors from the ever-lasting liabilities.

The young Maharaja showed maturity in settling the dues of the staff in this manner. In later years he would claim that as early as 1950 he had been convinced that the privy purses of the Indian princes could not be depended upon to provide a regular monthly or annual pension to the retired or retrenched staff in perpetuity. If, for some reason, the privy purses went, the liabilities for paying out pensions with monotonous regularity would still remain with the Maharaja. (In fact, the merger of Bikaner into Greater Rajasthan barely a year and a half earlier had already demonstrated the impermanence of recent arrangements and, in the young Maharaja's view, anything was possible!)

The other business affairs were also gradually organised, and estate duties paid in England and France. The task of dealing with the incomplete buildings was given into the capable hands of Thakur Jaswant Singh of Daudsar. As Karni Singh recorded several years afterwards, "Thakur Jaswant Singhji took over the responsibility of completing the buildings like the new museum and the Sadul Club from certain public funds that he had collected, and from the Sadul Water Supply Scheme The buildings in my part I somehow managed to complete at my cost. Little did we realize then that these buildings would one day prove so valuable."

Within a couple of years, the situation had been sorted out. With Bikaneri and family affairs in some sort of order, the 23rd Maharaja of Bikaner was ready for the whatever the future held for him Over the coming three decades and more, Karni Singh would go on to win laurels for his country as a shooter and Olympian marksman. Simultaneously, he would also take on the role of a Parliamentarian, for which ground was already being prepared. This parliamentary career was to form an integral part of his life for the next quarter of a century.

Seven

MAHARAJA DR. KARNI SINGH, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



AS THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS OF INDIA POURED in, the 23rd Maharaja of Bikaner prepared himself for his new role as an elected Member of Parliament to the Lok Sabha, the house of representatives of India's bicameral republican democracy. It was January 1952, and Maharaja Karni Singh, contesting as an Independent, had been elected from the Bikaner-Churu parliamentary constituency. Polling 1,17,926 out of the 1,87,682 votes cast, the Maharaja had clearly finished ahead of all rival candidates, with a thumping majority of 63,000 votes.

When Karni Singh had succeeded to the title of Maharaja of Bikaner in 1950, he had not anticipated a career in politics. The Indian republic was young though, and when the first general elections for India were announced, circumstances led the Maharaja of Bikaner into considering parliament as a future field of action. One particular conversation during an aeroplane flight with Maharaja Hanwant Singh of Jodhpur in 1951 played no small role towards this decision.

A meeting had been convened of the former rulers of Rajputana at Jaipur by the Maharaja of Jaipur, *Rajpramukh* of the recently integrated States of Rajasthan, in his capacity as the chairman of the Council of

Rajasthan Princes.

During dinner the evening prior to Karni Singh's proposed flight, he received a phone message from the Maharaja of Jodhpur asking whether Karni Singh could fly up to Jodhpur the next morning and give him a lift to the meeting as his plane had broken down. The Maharaja of Jodhpur, older to his Bikaner counterpart by one year, was a lifelong friend of Karni Singh, and the latter willingly agreed to the changed programme, even though this meant an additional two hours of flying time from Bikaner to Jaipur. It also meant getting up very much earlier in the morning — some thing that Karni Singh detested!

Little realising that this trip was to change his entire pattern of life, Karni Singh took off at dawn next morning for Jodhpur. At Jodhpur he found Maharaja Hanwant Singh waiting at the airport, along with his pilot Geoff Conway, and learnt that the Jodhpur plane was perfectly airworthy and would follow, and that the Maharaja of Jodhpur had asked for a ride to Jaipur so that he could discuss certain important issues privately with the Maharaja of Bikaner. Karni Singh thus flew his Beechcraft Bonanza on to Jaipur with Hanwant Singh seated besides him.

As they flew over the territory demarcating the erstwhile Jodhpur and Jaipur kingdoms, the Maharaja of Jodhpur pointed to the Nagaur *pargana* area below them to their left. This had, till integration in 1949, been part of the erstwhile princely state of Jodhpur. The area now formed part of the newly constituted Bikaner-Churu constituency. "If you decide to contest the forthcoming elections for Parliament," he told the Maharaja of Bikaner, "I will canvas for you in the areas which lie within Jodhpur territory"

Maharaja Karni Singh was completely taken aback. Running for any sort of political post had been furthest from his mind. He was, however, well aware that for the purposes of the forthcoming first General Elections, Bikaner constituency also included the area of Nagaur

As Karni Singh assimilated the suggestion, he also learned, for the first time, about Maharaja Hanwant Singh's own decision to run for Parliament. By the time they finally arrived at Jaipur, Karni Singh had agreed to think the matter over seriously before coming to a decision either way.

Through the rest of the day, Karni Singh continued to mull over the suggestion. His entire upbringing under his grandfather, Maharaja

Ganga Singh, had emphasised 'serving' the people of Bikaner; and in a broader sense, serving the 'nation' that gave a human being sustenance. His father, Bikaner's anointed Maharaja, had voluntarily signed away his birthright as an independent ruler by becoming the first Indian Maharaja to put his signature to the Instrument of Accession, joining Bikaner with the new nation-state of India on August 7, 1947 — a full seven days before India actually became independent. And this because Maharaja Sadul Singh had truly believed that the greater good of the land took precedence over personal desires and ambitions.

As Karni Singh well remembered, during the short period that his father had occupied the throne of Bikaner, there had been innumerable meetings, conferences and discussions between the Government of India (both British India and later that of the newly independent India) and the Indian States, as well as between the Princely Indian States themselves, which the Bikaner ruler had attended. Prince Karni Singh, as Bikaner's heir-apparent, had accompanied his father to many of these meetings as an observer, and believed that through this he had acquired some understanding of wider administrative and political matters.

In addition to learning and gaining experience while accompanying Maharaja Sadul Singh to various discussions and gatherings, Karni Singh had also acted for his father, during the Maharaja's visits to England for medical treatment. This had facilitated his getting a good grounding in administration, politics and 'real politicks'! Entering Parliament could, perhaps, be one way of putting all his training and learning to good use.

On his return to Bikaner, the Maharaja had a long conversation with his mother, Rajmata Sudarshan Kumari of Bikaner. A strong-minded lady, she had always been a firm influence on her elder son. She could be as stubborn as she was gentle, as her family well knew. For she had continued to use the *purdah* even though her husband and son, both very modern thinking men in their own way, had often requested her to give it up as it was no longer required of her.

In fact, if in Karni Singh's childhood the strongest influence on the prince had been his grandfather, Ganga Singh, and in his early youth his father, Sadul Singh, from now on it would be his mother who would prove the strongest influence, particularly in the political career he was about to embark upon. She agreed that joining public life would be one positive way in which Karni Singh could work for the betterment of the

country. For Karni Singh, who had no idea of making politics a life-long vocation, the die had been cast!

As a logical step, Karni Singh also met C.S. Venkatachar, Bikaner's one-time Prime Minister, who was then the Secretary of State in the Union Ministry, and Gopalaswami Iyengar, the Minister of State. They talked at length about why the Maharaja wanted to join politics and contest elections. Iyengar also suggested to the young Maharaja that if he had indeed decided to fight the forthcoming elections, it would be best if he contested as an Independent candidate, rather than opting for any particular political party. Karni Singh considered this piece of advice seriously and opted to follow it for the entire period he was to remain in politics.

Besides Maharaja Karni Singh, the other three contestants in the four-cornered contest, were Khushal Chand Daga of the Congress Party (who happened to be a friend of the Bikaner Maharaja), Murlidhar Vyas of the Socialist Party, and another Independent, Chirânjee Dayal Goel, who was commonly referred to as the *Sher-e-Bikaner* (or 'Lion of Bikaner').

This victory was the beginning of Karni Singh's career in politics. For the next twenty five years, until 1977 when he decided not to stand for re-election for yet another term, the Maharaja would be returned to Parliament every election year, without any break His mother, the Rajmata remained, until her death in 1971, one of her son's strongest supporters and advisers through this entire period. "She was in touch with all the other political royal ladies of the time," recalls her granddaughter Rajyashree Kumari, "Raj-Dadisa Jodhpur, Maharani Gayatri Devi of Jaipur and Rajmata Vijayraje Scindia of Gwalior They all thought highly of her."

Karni Singh, the youngest elected Member of Parliament at the time, found his early years in Parliament to be extremely exciting. At the very outset, he had made it clear that he was in Parliament as a representative of the people of his constituency and not as a Maharaja He had also decided to speak frankly on any issue that held his attention, irrespective of the political party involved. Thus, he went on to support those bills, acts and actions that he believed would improve the social and economic life of the citizens of India, and help in maintaining the unity and security of the nation. For him, therefore, it did not matter which political party introduced a bill, for it was the stand that he supported or

rejected, regardless of the political leanings of the proponents and opponents

He was also clear in his mind that he was not going to angle for any posts and 'prizes', and consequently, would vote as his conscience demanded and not to please either the ruling party or the opposition. He never regretted this decision in later years, not even during the Emergency, though people frequently told him that he had lost opportunities for ministries or ambassadorial positions by not playing his cards right.

Immediately after winning the elections, the new Member of Parliament-elect Maharaja issued a note, thanking the citizens of the Bikaner-Churu-Nagaur-Didwana area for having reposed their faith in him, and promising that he would always strive to serve them whole-heartedly Soon afterwards, Karni Singh also toured his area, assuring the people that he would continue to work for their interests in the Lok Sabha.

The start of the young Maharaja's parliamentary career was not without drama, for it was during one of these tours that an adventure befell him unwittingly! Soon after winning his seat, Karni Singh flew out in an aeroplane belonging to his Udaipur brother-in-law, to Sardarshahr to make a speech in February 1952. This was his very first trip for this purpose Karni Singh was scheduled to land at Sardarshar and proceed on his tour from there, and a huge crowd was assembled and waiting at the airfield to greet him.

While landing the plane bounced back up, so the pilot took it up again and came in for a fresh landing (On recalling the incident in later years, Karni Singh could not be sure whether this was Squadron Leader Brumby or Wing Commander Cox). This time round one of the wheels folded and the plane nosed over. Before the pilot and his co-passengers, Maharaja Karni Singh and his brother, Maharaj Amar Singh, could do anything, an anxious crowd had surrounded the plane, clambering on top of the wing The plane was a total wreck and an undoubted write-off!

Meanwhile, the whole nation was looking to the opening of the first session of Parliament. That morning, accompanied by Jodhpur's Maharaj Ajit Singh (brother of the late Maharaja Umaid Singh, and uncle of Maharaja Hanwant Singh of Jodhpur, who had won his Parliamentary seat but died in a tragic plane crash in late January 1952, even as the election results were coming in), Thakur Bhawani Singh of Pokhran and Raj Chander Singh, Karni Singh reached the Parliament

building at 8 a.m., hours before the session was to open. The four of them chose seats in the fourth row and did not budge. By the time the other members came, a *fait accompli* had been established and the seats remained with them. A few weeks later, Karni Singh was allotted a better seat in the third row by the Speaker. This seat was to remain with him for the next ten years. Eventually, he moved another place forwards to the second row, where he sat for the rest of his parliamentary career.

Soon after becoming a Member of Parliament, the Maharaja decided to give his salary towards scholarships for poor students. "When I was elected to Parliament, I suddenly realized that I would be getting a few hundred rupees a month as Parliamentary income. In the early days it used to be, I think, forty rupees a day for the days you attended plus five hundred rupees a month, which was later raised to one thousand rupees a month, plus about a hundred rupees or a little less for the days you attended. I decided then and there that I would donate this entire amount for scholarships to poor students," Karni Singh reminisced a couple of years before his demise.

"I kept just one day's income, and with that I made myself a little silver seal, which cost about fifty rupees then, and on this I had engraved [the words] 'One day's honest income'. That one day's income I have kept. The rest of it, amounting to almost a lakh [of rupees] or more, was given as scholarships to poor and needy children of the Bikaner area."

In fact, the Bikaner family had long followed the example set by Maharaja Ganga Singh as far as keeping personal and state expenses separate was concerned. During Maharaja Ganga Singh's reign, if the family used a car they paid for it. His heir, Maharaja Sadul Singh, had been equally particular.

Karni Singh sometimes thought of an incident which had occurred when he was a child of about ten. Bhanwar Karni Singh, heir to the crown-prince of Bikaner and grandson of the ruler, used to receive two rupees as pocket money each month. On one occasion, the child took a fancy to a special fountain pen, which cost Rs. 6/- and promptly bought it. For this, he received a severe scolding from his mother for being such a spendthrift. Her contention was that a Re. 1/- pen was easily available and would have served just as well as a pen that cost six times more

Princess Sudarshan Kumari was neither a miser nor a kill-joy. At the same time, she wanted her children to realise the worth of money In the years to come, as her daughter and sons grew older, they would have

plenty of money to do as they wished — even to squander as they liked, but she wanted them to feel that instead of spending on frivolities it was better to think of the less fortunate.

As a result of this initial training, Karni Singh found, throughout his adolescent years, a diminishing desire to spend money on himself. Once an adult, he enjoyed spending large amounts on gifts for others and for charity, but always experienced a tiny pang of guilt whenever he spent money on himself. It was, consequently, only to be expected that he gave up the entire salary he received as a parliamentarian for works of charity.

Soon after Parliament was called into session, there was a vote by the Opposition on an adjournment motion censuring the Government on its food policy. Karni Singh stood up along with other members to make up fifty in order to have the motion admitted. A couple of days later, Gopalaswami Iyengar, then Minister for Home, told him privately that he should not have stood up and opposed the Government, specially since there were plans to expand the Cabinet.

He even hinted rather broadly that he had wanted to take Karni Singh as his Deputy Minister! Karni Singh responded by clarifying that he wanted to do his job properly as a member of Parliament, and that if there was a food shortage in the country, it was his duty to stand up with the Opposition and draw the attention of Government to the situation For the time being, that was the end of the matter.

That November, Karni Singh made his maiden speech to the Lok Sabha. Joining the discussion around the Estate Duty Bill on November 7, 1952, the Bikaner Member of Parliament stated candidly that, "...most of these eloquent speeches made here have not taken into consideration one thing. Nobody here seems to know what it means to be hit by the Bill. It is all abstract so far. In my case, I know something about the working of this Act. My father died two years ago leaving a house in France. ..I can neither occupy that house, nor can I even touch it... Do we want that this condition should be applied to nine lakhs of Indian people, who are going to be affected by this Bill? Life is sufficiently complicated already. I wonder if it is wise that we should try to complicate our system more?"

The following month, on December 17, 1952, Karni Singh again spoke in Parliament during the debate on the nation's First Five Year Plan. This time he brought up the issue of enhanced aid to Rajasthan by the central government and the need "...for industries — large, small, cottage or any other type — to absorb our unemployed labour." He also asked for

Jaisalmer to be linked by rail, and stressed the necessity of additional wells to be sunk in the desert area, top priority to the Chambal (irrigation) scheme, and attempts to bring Bhakra water as far south into Rajasthan as possible. In addition, Karni Singh pleaded that the erstwhile capital cities of Rajasthan should not be allowed to deteriorate beyond the condition they were in 1949, prior to Integration.

On July 30, 1953 Karni Singh gave a memorandum to the Gadgil Committee — the team visiting Bikaner as part of their tour of all the States, regarding the problem of unemployment in the Bikaner area. Cataloging causes, he also provided a list of possible solutions. These included the setting up of woollen, fertilizer, cement and glass industries in the region. He followed it up by drawing attention in the Lok Sabha to the severe famine raging in northern Rajasthan. As a result of his persistent efforts, the Rajasthan State Government increased its allocation of famine-relief works grant from a mere Rs. 3 lakhs to Rs. 35 lakhs. He also wrote a letter to the Union Minister in support of a radio station at Bikaner — the short-lived pre-Independence effort having become just a memory by then!

The year 1953 also had immense personal significance for Karni Singh. It was on June 4, 1953, that a daughter was born to the Maharaja and Maharani of Bikaner. Given the name Rajyashree Kumari, the child was to have a lifelong special bond with her father.

By the mid 1950's, Karni Singh had gained confidence as a Member of Parliament. In August 1955, he wrote a letter to the Minister for Railways, Lal Bahadur Shastri, asking for rail connections to grain markets and *mandis* where such connections were lacking, and for a proper tarred road network linking major towns and *mandis* in the Bikaner division in order to ensure supplies to canal areas. In this letter and elsewhere he also stressed having a railway line connection to Hindumalkot in Ganganagar and extending the existing rail network to Jaisalmer. As a result, the Ganganagar-Hindumalkot rail line was completed, and later, Jaisalmer was linked by train.

If 1953 was a special year, the year 1956 was no less special. This was the year that saw the birth of the second daughter of the Maharaja and Maharani of Bikaner. Born on August 9, 1956, the younger princess was named Madhulika Kumari.

Meanwhile, Karni Singh's convictions and frankness as an Independent member, had led to his receiving a letter marked 'Confidential' from

the Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1954. Dated 23rd May, 1954, the Prime Minister's letter No. 318-PMI/54 stated that:

"A month or two later, we shall have to decide about our next delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. The actual Assembly meets in the middle of September and lasts for about 2½ months or so. But we have to decide a good time ahead. This is partly necessary because we have to send the names earlier, but chiefly so because we want those persons we have chosen to acquaint themselves with the subjects under discussion there and to develop some kind of a team-spirit even before they go. It is essential that they should work as a team and should be well up in those subjects."

"India is playing, by force of circumstances, a more and more important part in international affairs and in the United Nations especially. A heavy burden falls upon us and we have, therefore, to take our work in the United Nations in all seriousness and our delegates have to work hard and be interested in the subject. Naturally, those who go there have to be in agreement with our policies and have to pull together."

"I have no idea of what your views as well as inclinations are with such matters, that is, whether you agree with these policies and whether you are attracted towards what might be called international problems To some extent, of course, everyone is interested, but I am referring to a special inclination."

"In thinking of the members of our Delegation, we have naturally to choose some experienced persons who have represented us previously and know conditions in the United Nations. But, we should also like to have some younger men, preferably from Parliament, so that they might get this experience and training and be able to fit themselves better for the future for such work. Among the younger names, your name came up before me. I should like to have a talk with you about this matter, that is, if this type of work attracts you..."

"It is our intention to make Shri V.K. Krishna Menon, the Leader of the Delegation."

"No decisions will be made at this stage which is largely exploratory, and I am writing to you chiefly to find out how you feel about it.."

Karni Singh never made any secret of the fact that he respected, even hero-worshipped, Pandit Nehru. However, at that time he was suffering from an ear-ailment that had needed an operation, and was unable to take up the assignment being offered since he had been forbidden air-travel

under medical advice. He wrote back to the Prime Minister, thanking him and explaining his inability to accept the assignment because of his health problem.

Much later, V.K. Krishna Menon was to comment to the Bikaner Maharaja that he had suggested to the Prime Minister that one of the posts of India's delegates to the United Nations General Assembly be offered to Karni Singh, but the Maharaja had not taken up the offer. Karni Singh explained about his ailment all over again, though he would never be sure if the Minister, or for that matter, the Prime Minister, had really understood. For himself, he knew that his refusal was because of a genuine medical problem, and that he had not offered a diplomatically worded rebuff.

In retrospect, this was perhaps a major turning-point or decision in the Maharaja's life. Whether this would have inevitably led to a career in diplomacy can only be a matter of conjecture. In later years, though Karni Singh was not asked again, two of his counter-parts, the Maharaja of Patiala and the Maharaja (Maharao) of Kota, were sent to the United Nations as part of India's delegation.

Whether, at a later point in time, there was regret over the decision is a moot question. Karni Singh himself admitted that, "Many people tell me that I have played my cards wrong and that I should have been more conciliatory to the Government. They also say that if only I had agreed to become a member of the ruling party I could have been a Minister or Governor, but for myself, I know that becoming an Ambassador or Minister etc. has never been an ambition. This holds no extra charm for me, because I have seen all the pomp and glory of a different era, and I know that eating of golden plates or driving a big car is not everything in life."

"...I was born in a family of Maharajas who had all the titles, all the glamour, all the power, all the gold, all the silver and cars etc., but none of this mattered to me. I like my individual freedom and if I were to take any of these posts I would lose my most precious asset of freedom. Freedom to move around, meet people and not be hampered by official status".

In the months and years that followed, Karni Singh took up many issues in Parliament. He also wrote to concerned ministers and officials — both at the local, state and central govt. level — in connection with his constituency, as and when the need arose. However, as his parliamen-

tary staff well knew, Karni Singh hated to pester officials and ministers unnecessarily. "They are busy people, performing a public duty," he always informed his secretary and others. "We should not interfere with their work, except when essential." A former senior bureaucrat, who had seen pre-Independence Bikaner and was subsequently posted there again in the 1950's recalls that Karni Singh never approached the government for any personal work or any favour. Whenever he took up a matter with the administration or the state government it always concerned the average citizen.

In 1957, the second general elections were due. At this stage Karni Singh was approached by the Congress party and asked to stand as their candidate. The Maharaja did a lot of thinking. Then he talked with a number of people, including his constituents, and consulted with his mother. Eventually, Karni Singh opted to stand once again as an Independent candidate. When the results of the second general elections of India were declared, Karni Singh found himself re-elected to Parliament from Bikaner-Churu and Ganganagar — a double member constituency with a nearly 99,000 votes majority.

Karni Singh's mother was a key figure in influencing the Maharaja's decision to stand as an Independent candidate once again, rather than accept the offer of a Congress ticket. She had so far followed his parliamentary career avidly, and was always on hand with views and opinions whenever these were sought.

"On the day of the elections, my grandmother made sure that a couple of mini vans arrived early in the morning and each and every one of her maid servants was dispatched to the polling booths," remembers her granddaughter Rajyashree Kumari of later elections. "And of course, when Daddy did win, as he always did, then there was great joy and celebrations, drinks and sweets were distributed to all who went to congratulate her. I think they preferred to go to her side of the Palace as they got nice sweetmeats to eat, rather than congratulate my father as all they got [from him] was a cup of tea!"

As in his previous term, Karni Singh once again took up issues on the floor of Parliament with enthusiasm in his second term. Before making a speech or tabling a question, he would painstakingly collect information on the issue — a trait he tried to teach all who worked with him, and then put it all together. He usually worked hard on his speeches in advance. As a norm, Karni Singh used to jot down notes and points on

which he would speak in advance, preferring not to make impromptu speeches unless unavoidable. As far as possible, he would prepare himself thoroughly with the facts and then have a timed practice-run in the privacy of his own study at home.

A number of the issues he raised in the Lok Sabha in the years that followed pertained, in particular, to poverty, famine-relief, water and irrigation, power and electricity, unemployment, housing, illiteracy, sports, defence, the cause of Rajasthani language, health and family planning.

For instance, on October 26, 1959, Karni Singh wrote to the Minister for Irrigation about the necessity of having a lift-irrigation system for the Lunkaransar area. This was an issue he had previously raised in a speech made on May 23, 1957, regarding the need for a method of lift irrigation from the Rajasthan Canal to the Lunkaransar area, where the water was extremely brackish. He had reiterated this demand for Rajasthan Canal water to be made available in the Lunkaransar area through a lift-irrigation system many times in the years that followed.

As he put it, "I served on the Irrigation & Power Committee, because I realised that this would be the most vital committee for our purposes, because Bikaner was fighting for the Lift Channel. It took us nearly 15 years to get to the stage when the channel could become a reality, and that too after a very, very, long battle in Parliament. This included showing films of Lunkaransar, how people came for water from long distances which was transported from Bikaner to Lunkaransar by train. Speaking on various occasions in Parliament on the subject, I reminded them how difficult it was in the desert to get water, and it was finally Pandit Nehru who put in a word to say that he agreed with the young Member, and everybody in the country had a right to have drinking water... And finally, it was quoting Nehru's speech, that everyone had a right to drinking water that resulted in the Government finally agreeing to the lift channel. Some years earlier, the Central Government Ministry of Health, particularly Dr. Sushila Nayyar, who was then Minister of Health, had said that they would not provide drinking water unless it was filtered. So I showed them films of the people, as they were suffering, and pointed out — on a day when electricity had failed and no water was available in Delhi, which also happened to be a hot summer day — that the people in the desert were living without drinkable water, and that the nearest water was supplied from Bikaner 40 to 50 miles by train

everyday. That made a difference! ...At this stage, Dr. K.L. Rao, who was minister was our most important help. The people of Nagaur were saying that unless Nagaur was included in the lift channel, the channel should not be given, but Dr. Rao said that water should be brought up to Bikaner in the first phase, and then the next phase up to Nagaur could be discussed. And finally, thanks to Nehru's blessings, and the blessings of Dr. K.L. Rao, the lift channel became a reality. So, fortunately, the water came and this was my biggest dream come true!"

It was on July 5, 1968, that the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Mohanlal Sukhadia, eventually inaugurated the Lunkaransar-Bikaner Lift Irrigation Channel. Karni Singh always considered this as one of his most worthwhile achievements in his long career as a Member of Parliament. Modestly, he did not flaunt his role over the achievement, and made no attempts at gaining extra publicity for his work. But the people of the area gave credit where due in their own inimitable way. In their opinion, Dr. Karni Singh, Member of Parliament (also *annadata* to some), had done exactly what one would have expected from the grandson of Maharaja Ganga Singh. Work on the Rajasthan Canal (now known as the Indira Gandhi Nahar Project — IGNP) was also speeded up.

The inclusion of Rajasthani in the list of recognized languages within the Indian Constitution was another life-long ambition. This he could never attain. A staunch believer in the importance of local languages, the Maharaja brought up his children to be fluent in Marwari, the Rajasthani language spoken throughout the extent of his erstwhile State of Bikaner Since Karni Singh was a life-long advocate for the inclusion of the Rajasthani language in the list of the recognized languages, in 1968 he presented a Bill in the Lok Sabha and argued passionately for including Rajasthani as one of the officially recognized languages of the country.

This Bill, recalls Rajyashree Kumari, "...was very important and dear to him." Karni Singh frequently pointed out in speeches, articles and radio-talks that despite having several dialects and regional variations, the collective common 'Rajasthani' possessed a rich literary and bardic heritage, rules of grammar etc., and was regarded as a 'language' — with all the connotations of that word — by linguists. The matter was brought up time and again. "You know that we have four large dictionaries prepared in Rajasthani...," he later told the House. "...We have films in Rajasthani. We have newspapers and magazines in Rajasthani. And more

than two crores of people speak this language not only in Rajasthan but wherever they are domiciled, even in other States and outside India." However, this was one Bill Karni Singh was not to see passed by Parliament.

Early in his career as a parliamentarian, Karni Singh had opposed the shifting of certain vital offices from Bikaner — among these the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, the Camel Breeding Centre, sheep and wool improvement office etc., and ensured that these continued to be based at Bikaner. During his initial couple of terms in Parliament, he constantly urged the setting up of different kinds of industries, including cottage industries, in Rajasthan, particularly in the desert region. He also stood for the provision of basic needs to small towns and villages.

It was a direct result of his work that eventually a medical college was established at Bikaner. Predictably, he did not use his prerogative to have this named after a member of his family, though he was personally on hand to greet Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at the opening of this new 'Sardar Patel Medical College'. It was also because of his efforts that a cobalt therapy unit was later set up in the hospital. In a like manner, a second agricultural research farm was also started at Jaitsar, near Suratgarh, because of his vigorous demands in this direction.

In the field of education, not only did Karni Singh emphasise the importance of sports in student curriculum, but he also worked towards the opening of M.A. classes at the Maharani Sudarshan Kumari College for Women, and the increasing of hostel facilities for girl students. He initiated the demand for an Agricultural University to be located at Ganganagar. Having started by putting forward the requirements of his constituents, however, through his entire period in the Lok Sabha Karni Singh spoke for not only the interests of his constituency, but also for the state of Rajasthan, and the nation as a whole.

Karni Singh was never an abrasive speaker in the Lok Sabha and won admiration when he later spoke out in 1967 against a growing tendency to indulge in mud-slinging, slander and abusive language in Parliament. He also accorded the fullest of respect to people who held public office, whatever their political leanings.

Always meticulous in his preparations, in 1959, prior to his departure on a round-the-world trip accompanied by Maharani Sushila Kumari,

Karni Singh contacted the Prime Minister of India, Pandit Nehru, to say that he was going around the world, and that since he was a Member of Parliament, what stand should he take if asked questions about India's foreign policy? Pandit Nehru responded by saying succinctly that India's stand was clear on non-alignment and that is the line the Maharaja should take. The Prime Minister also made arrangements for someone from the Ministry of External Affairs to meet with Karni Singh to brief him, as well as to clarify any general queries, doubts or points that the Maharaja had in mind. "I admired the great man for his strong belief in non-alignment, and continued, throughout my trip, to voice the feelings of the great Jawaharlal Nehru," Karni Singh was to acknowledge later.

Over time, he was also appointed to work on various Parliamentary Select Committees. This was a pattern that would persist during his quarter of a century as a MP. Though soft-spoken, Karni Singh was nobody's "Yes-Man", and spoke for and against the Treasury and the Opposition benches according his perception of the issue under discussion

Recalling his experiences in later decades, Karni Singh commented about the 1957 period, ". when TTK [T.T. Krishnamachari, Union Finance Minister], after consulting Prof. Kaldor, had a brain-wave that there should be an integrated tax structure, and with that he brought in wealth tax, expenditure tax, gift tax and the like. With this integrated tax structure, the citizen was totally messed up. Now TTK had borrowed various laws from different countries, including the advice of Prof. Kaldor, but forgot the most important advice that the total quantum of tax should not exceed 50% because this was what Prof. Kaldor said. TTK had to be one up on all others, so he brought in the wealth tax and the income tax, and this went on and on till a stage came when a man paid almost 50% more in taxes than his total income!"

"I remember that when this tax was introduced, Maharaja of Baroda, who was then an MP, and myself went and met Govind Ballabh Pant, who was Home Minister, and then TTK. We also negotiated on behalf of the princes, because the expenditure tax was such a steep tax that after a few thousand rupees the expenditure tax was 100%! And since princes had obligatory expenses that had to be made out of their Privy Purses, it would mean approximately that a ruler with a Privy Purse of 10 lakhs would be paying 10 lakhs in expenditure tax! The government then

realised that this was incongruous and impossible and finally introduced a 'Clause J' in the Expenditure Tax Act, whereby the rulers could compound the expenditure tax on the basis of their Privy Purses. This was fixed at 10% of the total Privy Purse. So in our case, we opted for many years to pay the 1 lakh of rupees in expenditure tax."

"But I remember a rather hilarious thing which came out with expenditure tax. The law said that a man would have to pay tax if he went abroad and what-not. But there was a loophole Animals were exempt. Consequently, if an owner of a horse — say a race-horse — accompanied the horse as its *scyce*, then his entire expenditure would be exempted! And I mentioned this in Parliament to everyone's amusement... I remember that [Maharaja of] Baroda and I tried very hard for appointments with ministers, and although both of us were MPs, sometimes we were waiting for a few days. Then Mr. Pochkanwala entered the scene to negotiate on behalf of the Nizam [of Hyderabad], and he wanted to go with us, and we said, 'yes, certainly'. So Pochkanwala said, 'Don't worry, I'll fix up my own time'. And he got an appointment much quicker than us, and he gave us a wink to say that you boys are waiting while I have finished the job."

Following a busy decade and two full terms as a Parliamentarian, the year 1962 began in a memorable manner for the Maharaja. That year Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, personally led the contingent of members of Parliament in the 26th January Republic Day parade. Since Karni Singh was the President of the MPs Rifle Club he had the honour of holding the first flag and walking immediately behind the Prime Minister and the Indian cabinet ministers A short while later he was presented with the 'Arjuna Award' for his shooting achievements by the nation

That was also the year that saw Karni Singh re-elected to Parliament for the third time. This time round, as was to be the case for the 1967 general elections too, the Congress party did not put up a candidate against Karni Singh. This was an apparent recognition of his strong ties with the constituency he had nurtured so carefully over the past decade since he had first been elected.

The Maharaja's penchant for Coca Cola led to a hilarious incident during his election campaign. On a visit to Sardarshahar for a public meeting, Karni Singh stopped briefly at the Rest House. As ever, a crowd soon surrounded him, and in keeping with his personal preference for

working out-of-doors, under the shade of some trees, he settled down to meeting the people and listening to their problems and suggestions. After a couple of hours of this, he became thirsty but was unwilling to move indoors since that would have inconvenienced the assembled 'petitioners'. Instead, Karni Singh made what he thought was a discreet signal of lifting a pretend-glass to his lips. His staff knew he was asking for a glass of Coca Cola and immediately complied.

At this point a local *seth* turned to Dalip Singh (who at the time had only recently begun working with Karni Singh and would later be his Parliamentary Secretary). "I had been told that this Maharaja was different to the others," he said. "But here he is drinking alcohol openly! If he must drink whisky at this time, at least he should not do so publically in front of all these people." Dalip and the others promptly attempted to set the record straight They explained the real situation to the *seth* and right before his eyes the remainder of the Coca Cola was poured out into a glass for him to taste from the same bottle to convince him!

Neither did Karni Singh's love for Coca Cola suffer as a result of this, however, nor did his habit of working out-of-doors as much as possible, surrounded by the people of his constituency. The shade of a 'neem' tree *(Azadirachta indica)* was his favourite venue for an office, and the words "*aao bhai*" were his invariable mode of calling forward each member of the public on these occasions. In time, this term of 'come brother' became a source of much amusement to his family and others. Karni Singh himself admitted on tape that "My children refer to my meeting the public as 'Papa has gone for his *Aao bhai* work'!"

It was around this time that Karni Singh took the decision of abrogating his personal shooting rights over a large piece of land at Tal Chappar, in what had once formed part of the erstwhile state of Bikaner and was now part of the administrative district of Churu. "The offer was made by me to the government on the understanding that they would make a black buck sanctuary of our ancestral shooting block," he stated. "And the government agreed at the time to do so. The Chappar Sanctuary is now on the tourist map."

Unfortunately, 1962 was also the year of the war between India and China, which resulted in a major blow to the psyche of India and led to severe introspection. Earlier that summer, relations between India and China had become further strained following the 'Galwan Incident' of July

10, 1962, when an Indian post in Ladakh's Galwan Valley had been surrounded by about 300 Chinese troops. The post had held out. At the same time, the Chinese had not lifted the siege. (In fact, they were soon to overrun the post that fateful October)!

The Galwan Incident had been followed by minor events. These culminated in the 'Thagla Affair' of September 8, 1962, in which about 600 Chinese troops crossed the international McMahon Line in the disputed Thagla Ridge area at 8 in the morning and threatened the Indian post of Dhola. From that time onwards Chinese intentions became more and more suspect. On October 3, China officially proclaimed that 'The McMahon Line is null and void and has never been recognised by any Chinese government'.

As a Member of Parliament, Karni Singh had been studying the Chinese subject and had attended many meetings of leaders of Opposition that Prime Minister Nehru had called from time to time, to discuss the Chinese problems. In October 1962, when he went to the World Shooting Championships at Cairo as a Clay Pigeon Traps shooter, it was with a troubled mind, for like the whole country he too was plagued by the situation.

On October 20, China opened fire at 5 a.m. in the morning. There was heavy bombardment of Indian positions for over an hour, followed by massive infantry assaults. The Sino-Indian War was short-lived, but had severe long-term effects on the Indian economy At the time of the war between India and China, Karni Singh donated Rs. 50,000 to the National Defence Fund; Rs. 5,000 to the Chief Minister's Defence Services Fund and Rs. 501 to the National Defence Assistance Committee of Bikaner, among other donations. He also proposed that the ancestral fort of the Bikaner rulers, the famous Junagarh, be used as a R.A.C. training centre during this period of war-related emergency.

Throughout his years in politics, Karni Singh gained the friendship and support of parliamentarians holding a range of political ideologies, and belonging to different political parties. Among them were communists like Hiren Mukerjee, socialists, members of the Congress and of the various opposition parties, and other independents.

Admiring Pandit Nehru as he did, Karni Singh always tried to make it a point to call on him at least once a year. Invariably, Pandit Nehru used to see off his guests at their cars personally Decades later, Karni Singh recalled a conversation that had occurred around 1956 with fond-

ness. The then 32 year old Karni Singh had called on the Prime Minister and, in the course of the conversation, made an apologetic remark about the fact that he was a member of the princely order. Pandit Nehru promptly turned around and chastised him for apologising at having been born a prince, saying, 'It is not your fault about the family you were born into, because you had no choice'.

Much later, Karni Singh, reflecting on his early years in Parliament, said, "When I [first] went to Parliament, I realized that there was a strange feeling towards the former princes in Parliament. People looked down on us But I was soon able to have this ironed out, and found that in a short span of time I was able to make friends with just about everybody There were a few things which helped me. One, I invariably showed respect to people older than myself. Second, I never claimed credit for anything I did Then, I never interrupted other members when they spoke; and finally, I always showed respect to the Minister, whoever he or she was; and in return, I found that I not only received their affection, but from the older MPs a desire to teach and coach me, which in later years proved to be most valuable I had a lot to learn at that time, and I can never forget the wonderful people who gave their time to help me"

If others helped Karni Singh, he too was not slow with assisting anybody who required assistance This was something he continued with during his entire quarter century as a parliamentarian, as Prof. P.G. Mavalankar, Dr. Karan Singh, Sardar Surjit Singh Majithia and many others were witness to.

Maharani (now Rajmata) Gayatri Devi of Jaipur once described how helpful the Bikaner Maharaja had been when she was elected to Parliament for the first time. "We first met at Lallgarh Palace in Bikaner when he was six years old and I was ten," she recalled. "Even at that young age he was the perfect host and full of enthusiasm whether we were riding or playing. Years later when I was first elected to Parliament in 1962 I shall never forget his concern when he learnt that I had to make my maiden speech in two hours and I had no one to type it; he encouraged me to talk into a tape-recorder and had the whole thing typed out for me. He was so encouraging and helpful."

Another former Member of Parliament who acknowledges his helpful nature of is the Rajmata of Jodhpur, wife of the late Maharaja Hanwant Singh of Jodhpur. She found his brotherly support of great help when it

came to standing for elections and taking up her duties in Parliament.

In his turn, someone towards whom Karni Singh always acknowledged his appreciation in parliamentary affairs was Thakur Prem Singh of Tehandesar. The Thakur, yet another member of Bikaner's old nobility, had served Bikaner State in many capacities from 1928 until 1948, including as its Revenue Minister. Subsequent to the entry into politics by Bikaner's 23rd Maharaja, he took on the role of Karni Singh's Advisor for Parliamentary Matters as well as his Public Relations Officer Prem Singhji retained the highest regard for the MP he had seen grow up from a kind-hearted boy to a large-hearted, concerned citizen of India.

In the meanwhile, Karni Singh had worked hard at his 'parallel career' as a clay pigeon shooter. In 1964, he repeated his 1960 Rome Olympics feat of being a parliamentarian who was also an Olympics level shooter, by being selected for the Tokyo Olympics through open selections. As a sports enthusiast, Karni Singh had often tried to focus the attention of Parliament towards India's sports policy, which he felt was "...sadly lacking in direction and purpose". On February 18, 1964 he told the Lok Sabha: "...the entire sports population in this country now have their attention focussed on the Indian contingent that will be going to Tokyo next October. ...I have had the good fortune to have represented my country four times abroad and worn Indian colours, but as a result of that I have also had the opportunities to share the joy and frustration of our Indian sportsmen, and because of that I know first hand what the problems Indian sportsmen face today..."

"The first is that the Indian Federations, though they are good bodies, do not seem to get the proper standards from their sportsmen. Secondly, the interest that the Federations take in the sports activities which they control in their respective fields is not adequate, and we need at least a hundred times more interest if we want to get any place Thirdly, the present State Education Departments are not represented at all on the sports council... Fourthly, an All India Conference should be convened and all Directors of Public Instructions should be invited as a matter of policy for the promotion of sports. Fifthly, the All India Council of Sports as the premier sports body should sponsor such a conference because this institution is the advisory body to Government, that is to the Government of India, on matters of sports promotion. Lastly, the dependence on the Army and Police to draw sportsmen is not entirely good. The talent must be drawn from schools and colleges also as is the case with

other countries.. "

The ensuing debate aroused considerable interest. Over the coming years, Karni Singh was to reiterate his views over and over again in Parliament. A couple of years later, when a controversy was sparked off between the Ministry of Education and the Indian Olympic Association over the number of sportspersons for the 5th Asian Games — with the Ministry wanting to clear a total strength of 81 sportspersons, while the Indian Olympic Association supported the sponsorship of 115 sportspersons, Karni Singh moved a 'Call Attention Motion' in Parliament on the issue. This again led to a lively debate in Parliament.

Karni Singh often deplored the facilities available to young shooters and other sportspersons in India, and made full efforts in Parliament to draw the attention of the House to their problems. At a personal level, he set up shooting ranges at Bikaner. He often voiced his hope that some day India could stage an Olympic games, which would arouse national interest in sports and enable Indian teams to forge ahead at a faster pace. It was with such motives that Karni Singh often raised questions relating to sports in Parliament

If sports was an interest, patriotism was a cherished ideal. In September 1965 when war broke out between India and neighbouring Pakistan, Karni Singh not only volunteered his services yet again in the service of his country, but also donated Rs. 50,000 to the National Defence Fund along with foreign currency to the value of Rs. 25,000. Besides this, the Maharaja gave 8000 gms of gold to the Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and bought gold bonds to aid the national effort.

At the same time, as a staunch believer in secularism, he issued a statement to his fellow-Indians during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, cautioning against any move to view any segment of the Indian population in a negative light. "We must at all times remember that we are a secular nation," he declared. "Dignity must go with magnanimity. We must not let our emotions run amuck and do anything which would go contrary to our cherished ideal of secularism."

It was while the Maharaja was a Parliamentarian that his doctoral thesis was approved for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Bombay on November 3, 1964. In 1965 Karni Singh went to Bombay to collect his Ph.D degree in person at a formal convocation held on March 19. For the Maharaja, as he stood in line with others, clad like him in their Ph.D gowns, and accepted his degree from the Vice

Chancellor of Bombay University, it was a proud moment indeed

Work on the Ph.D had begun in 1946 under the guidance of Father Heras, but circumstances had led to the dissertation taking a back seat for nearly eighteen years. In the intervening period, Karni Singh had decided, on the advice of Father Alphonso, the new Principal, to enlarge the title and scope of his dissertation from its original to 'The Relations of the House of Bikaner with the Central Powers — 1465 to 1949' with Prof. William Coelho of the Father Heras Institute, Bombay, as his Ph.D guide.

As a parliamentarian and a human being, he had few blind spots. 'Communism', however, was one of them! During the build-up to the Sino-Indian war in 1962 and immediately afterwards, he often warned Parliament of the inherent dangers of a Chinese kind of communism becoming dominant in India. Later, when India's leaning to the Soviet Union appeared to him to be making a mockery of the notion of non-alignment, he made his opinion clear to all. Communism, of both the Soviet and the Chinese model, remained a bug-bear for him through the 1960s to late 1970s. In a speech in Parliament he once said that if the hard-line communists ever came to power in India they would assassinate the representatives of the various left parties in Parliament! However, he had close personal friends among the Indian left There was no real dichotomy in this for him. It was not the ideology but what he perceived as its misapplication that troubled him.

Similarly, he felt that the slogan of *'Garibi hatao'*, when it was popularised, remained a gimmick and a stunt, without any real intentions of actually eradicating poverty behind it. Corruption remained another life-long bug-bear, against which Karni Singh was to raise his voice often over the years.

The unplanned growth of population was yet another constant issue on his mind. He once told an interviewer that there were various problems before the country, including those of poverty, unemployment, hunger and the educated unemployed, but to him the key problem appeared to be over-population.

"For fifteen years in Parliament," he stated, "I have spoken on India's over-population, stressing to the great leaders twice my age that unless we were able to control India's population the lid would blow off! I remember once speaking in Parliament, when Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru sat opposite, I mentioned the same thing, and the great man had answered that

while population explosion was a very major problem there were other problems before the country."

Karni Singh recalls getting very annoyed at this and exchanging some hot words with the Prime Minister in Parliament. For, while he agreed with that there were other problems before the country, his deep concern was whether "...India, with fifty thousand new children born every day, with thirty million entries in India's net population every year, be able to provide jobs or a higher standard of living for all our people?"

The Maharaja was of the opinion that if India's population explosion could be checked the nation would see, "...a great dramatic change when India's millions will be given better standards of living, better conditions to be educated in, better hospitals, better transport, [and so forth] ... If this be the case, I have no doubt that within a very short time our Five Year Plan funds will be able to achieve more... But if we go on as we are at the present rate, it is virtually a lost battle. The over-population is outstripping everything that our plans are in a position to give to our millions"

Someone with whom he had a running battle over the topic of over-population was his own valet, Asu Ram, who dutifully listened each time his *'An'ta'* *(Annadata)* gave a lecture on small families, but chose never to take the advice seriously

Besides subjects like drinking water, famine alleviation, unemployment, population-control, and so forth, which were close to his heart, Karni Singh's interests were wide-ranging. Rajyashree Kumari remembers that her father's "...bill to stop the export of frogs legs was very interesting as he was aware of the ecology even at that time. Bull frog legs were exported to the West, specially to France where they are considered to be a great delicacy What no one was aware of was the fact that this trade was very cruel; the legs of these poor frogs were removed while still alive and they were left to die slowly and painfully. I gather this has now been stopped, but he was the first to raise this matter."

Meanwhile, the political scenario was now showing a major shift in India. By the end of 1966, Karni Singh had repeated his call for the Opposition parties to come together on a common platform several times. But once again, his plea was like a voice in the wilderness. As yet another general election fell due in 1967, Karni Singh decided to stand for re-election. This time too he chose to stand as an Independent candidate, and as had happened in 1962, his candidature was unopposed

by the ruling party this time round too.

He explained his views on remaining an Independent candidate to his children succinctly. "As a non-party man I belong to Bikaner as a whole, as we have since the last 500 years. As a party man I would belong to a very small section only. Would you wish me tear apart my people after having bound and kept them bound together into a compact whole for the past five centuries?" he said to them.

The attempt at tearing apart the "compact whole" that Karni Singh considered his bounden duty to serve was on the horizon though. It came from without, and very soon. By the mid 1960s, the former princely families were being held up as anachronisms by many. Karni Singh had often told his children as they were growing up that they should not acquire too many air and graces, as princes and palaces and Privy Purses would soon be something out of history.

For him the writing on the wall had been clear for quite some time now. Even he, however, could not have guessed how quickly events would move over the next few years, and the boundary transition from prince to commoner would become a legal reality.

Eight

FROM PRINCE TO COMMONER



IN THE 1967 GENERAL ELECTIONS, KARNI SINGH WAS RE-ELECTED TO Parliament for the fourth time. Also elected to the Lok Sabha with him were twenty-three other princes. Around the same time, in elections held for the assemblies of different States, candidates related to the erstwhile ruling families also swept the polls. Meanwhile, events were rapidly moving towards the abolition of certain special rights and privileges granted to the Indian princes.

The Indian Constitution, promulgated in January 1950, contained several Articles and Clauses pertaining to the rulers of the erstwhile Indian princely States. While Article 366 (22) defined the term 'Ruler', Article 362 covered their privileges, Article 291 guaranteed the payment of tax-free Privy Purses and Article 263 guaranteed that any agreement with the rulers would not be justiciable.

The continuation of such privileges in a democracy now became a major issue for discussion in political circles, and the abolition of Privy Purses and other privileges began to be called for. Following the election victory of many independent or opposition party-linked princely candidates, pressures began to build up within the Congress party to set about clipping the wings of the rulers.

On June 23, 1967, the All India Congress Committee met in New

Delhi On behalf of the party 'High Command', Jagjivan Ram moved the official resolution on 'Implementation of Congress Programmes'. The tenth paragraph of this long document called for the abolition of all princely privileges. Stating that the privileges other than Privy Purses enjoyed by ex-rulers are incongruous to the concept and practice of democracy, the AICC took the view that the Government should examine these and take steps to remove them. The amendments demanding doing away with the Privy Purses were adopted by a snap vote of 17 against 4.

The only senior leader on the dias who voted against the amendment was Morarji Desai. The spirit behind the amendments passed by the AICC in 1967 contrasted sharply with 1949. Then, eighteen years earlier, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had commended the Constituent Assembly for its provisions relating to the privileges and Privy Purses of Indian Princes in the Constitution of India. Now those very privileges were regarded as an anachronism!

In response to implications of the AICC resolution, the All India convention of rulers met in New Delhi on August 12 and 13, 1967 Constituting themselves into a Concord of Princes, they issued a collective statement deploring "...the proposal to go back upon the instruments and agreements which created the Union of States that is India." Such a step, the statement said, would amount to a breach of faith, because it was not a "...question of mere oral undertakings but solemn treaties which came into being as a result of grave deliberations and negotiations."

"So far as we are concerned," went the statement, "it is not merely the question of Privy Purses, important though they are to all of us, but a matter of principle. We as Indians are concerned that moral principles, which are the very basis of society, that justice, which is the very basis of the State and honour, which is the very basis of the prestige of India, shall prevail. In all this the Princes of India stand united."

The statement further clarified that the Privy Purses were valued as formal tokens of public consideration for the part played by the rulers at a critical time in the resurgence of the Indian nation. That notwithstanding, the rulers were open for any discussion in the national interest and so that their viewpoint and position might be better understood. As those directly concerned they might, in self interest, set a high store by the provisions in the treaties and the Constitution, but at the same time, as citizens they were concerned that their country and its Government

stood firm on its public agreements and commitments.

The Privy Purses, the statement underlined, were not grants like pensions or confirments like honours given by the Government of India, which could be stopped at will. On the contrary, "The Privy Purse and privileges preserved in the treaties by which the rulers ceded their kingdoms and government to create the Union of India are but a small part of the 'property' which had always been theirs as of inherent lawful right."

A couple of months later, on October 28, 1967, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, asked the Union Minister for Home, Y.B. Chavan, to initiate formal negotiations with the princes. The press reported, at this stage, that many in the Cabinet were of the view that instead of abrogation of the Privy Purses, some way should be found for their phased abolition On November 3, Fateh Singh Rao Gaekwad of Baroda, the Begum of Bhopal and the Maharaja of Dhrangadhra met with the Home Minister, on behalf of the princes. At this preliminary meeting Chavan affirmed that there was no intention on the part of the Government to act in any way inconsistent with the honour of the Government and of the rulers. There would be, he assured the princes, neither coercion nor the compromising of the honour of the princes.

However, the minister's attitude seemed to stiffen from meeting to meeting. When the representatives from the Princes' Concord committee met with him on December 26, the minister informed them that the government had decided to implement the AICC resolution. At the same time, he explained that the government was prepared to work out some transitional arrangement. For this, the Home Ministry had formulated a scheme that envisaged a phased abolition of the Privy Purses over a 20 year period.

The princes were upset at the Government handling of the whole issue. In a letter to a brother prince, the Maharaja of Dhrangadhra deplored the fact that the Government of India had "...at no time appealed to the Princes or consulted them or their sentiments in a spirit of common endeavour for the public good." What was "equally galling", wrote the Maharaja Dhrangadhra, was the fact that neither had the Government shown any sign of grace nor allowed the Indian Princes any.

The talks continued over a space of time. Karni Singh was only too aware of the twists and turns of events He was also part of the team that held meetings and negotiations during 1969-70 in Delhi with Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi, and the Union Home Minister, Y.B. Chavan. The princes made an offer for voluntary adjustments of Privy Purses. However, the offer probably came at too late a stage and was regarded, in 'authoritative circles', as time barred and an unpractical proposition by that time

In *Lives of the Indian Princes,* Charles Allen and Sharada Dwivedi sum up the scenario leading to the abolition in the following words: "...During the three-year period of negotiations between the government and the Princes, a serious rift manifested itself in the ranks of the Congress party which caused the party leadership to seek the support of leftist groups, who in their turn demanded a speedy abolition of the princely order. Just when they seemed to be on the brink of a solution, the negotiations broke down. ...This proved to be the last missed opportunity in the Indian Princes' chequered history, in all probability caused by misunderstanding on both sides," (1984:334).

It was during these fateful years that the Indian government hosted a state banquet in honour of the visiting Chogyal of Sikkim. Karni Singh, a guest at the banquet, found himself seated on one side of the Chogyal, with Home Minister Chavan seated on the other. At one point during the conversation, Chavan leaned over and said to the Chogyal, "We have finished them [Princes] here." At this, Karni Singh told the Chogyal, "Your Highness had better be very careful, for it can be your turn next." Everyone who was within earshot at the time, was to remember those words a few years later, when that is precisely what happened to Sikkim in 1975.

On May 18, the last day of the session, the Home Minister introduced a three clause bill — the 24th Constitution Amendment Bill. This sought the omission of Articles 291, 362 and 366. "The concept of rulership with Privy Purse and special privileges unrelated to any current functions and social purpose," went the statement of objects and reasons for the bill, "is incompatible with an egalitarian social order. The Government has therefore decided to terminate the Privy Purse and privileges of the rulers of the former Indian States."

Gandhi informed the Indian princes that the bill to amend the Constitution for the abolition of the Privy Purse had been introduced and would come up for consideration and passage in Parliament. At the same time, she assured them that there was no intention to cause hardship to them, or injure their self-respect.

With the battle-lines firmly drawn, a two-day debate began in the Lok

Sabha on September 1, 1970, for the consideration of the Constitution 24th Amendment Bill. Upon the outcome of this hung the fate of the Indian princely order. As Karni Singh took his seat in Parliament, the tension and excitement in the atmosphere was palpable. The visitors gallery was packed to over-flowing. It was similar in the case of the press gallery. Every ruling party and Opposition MP who could make it was there, with 493 out of the total strength of 522 members present in the House

On September 2, the second day of the debate, Karni Singh was the main speaker on behalf of the Opposition. (See Appendix for text of his speech) Speaking very candidly, he said that the Princes had been made pawns in the game of a trial of strength between the two Congress factions The whole issue was politically motivated, and on the part of the Government it was an attempt to divert the people's attention from more pressing problems needing urgent solutions. The ruling party wanted to destroy the image of the Princes, he stated, so that the 'Chairocrats' could remain in power.

The voting was predictable. Indira Gandhi urged the members to act in accordance with the times. And amidst much excitement the Lok Sabha adopted the Constitution Amendment Bill by a margin of eight votes over the prescribed 2/3rds majority with 336 for and 155 against. Some of the princes who were members of the Congress party abstained from voting, while some voted in favour of the bill.

A triumphant and confidently cocksure Prime Minister moved the Rajya Sabha a couple of days later for consideration of the bill. The situation was theatrical. The government thought the bill was in the bag, so to speak. At the same time, some members had been unable to make it to the House because of a wildcat strike by airlines employees. Yet another member was brought straight from the hospital to the Rajya Sabha on a stretcher.

The voting produced a sensational result! The bill was defeated by 1/3rd of a vote. The votes were 149 for and 75 against, whereas the government had needed a vote of 149 & 1/3 to make up the requisite 2/3rds majority to carry the motion.. Amidst much suspense the Chair took nearly one hour to announce the dramatic decision about the defeat of the bill. Pandemonium resulted.

Immediately after the government failed to secure the 2/3rds majority in the Rajya Sabha, Karni Singh passed Prime Minister Gandhi in the hall.

The Prime Minister was in an absolute fury, he noted. He said to her, "We, the Princes, are loyal subjects of this country and are prepared to die for it Why are we being treated like enemies?" To this, as he later informed friends and well-wishers, she muttered words to the effect of 'I'll get you all for this. I will take care of you all'.

Almost instantly after the adverse vote, Indira Gandhi called a meeting of the Internal Affairs Committee. A decision was taken to secure a Presidential Order, de-recognising the princes en masse. (In fact, according to some journalists, the Prime Minister had kept a draft Presidential Order ready in advance. This order had apparently been prepared halfway through the debate some hours before the fateful vote in the Rajya Sabha.) A little later that night, the Cabinet met in an emergency meeting. A short while afterwards, a special plane left for Hyderabad to get the President's signature on the ordinance. The papers were presented to the President of India at Hyderabad for his signature, just short of midnight.

With the stroke of a pen the titles and Privy Purses of the Indian princes had been formally abolished. Ironically, it had taken not much more in 1947, when many Indian princes had put their mark on a document, acceding their thrones and kingdoms to the new nation-state of India.

On September 7, the Government of India despatched individual letters to the princes, informing them of their de-recognition Simultaneously, orders were sent to the different state governments, advising them to withdraw the special privileges hitherto enjoyed by the rulers. On the 11th of the same month, the princes — among them the Maharajas of Udaipur, Gwalior, Nabha, Kutch and Nalagarh — went to the Supreme Court with writ petitions questioning the constitutional validity of the Presidential Order. The Maharajas of Patna, Dhrangadhra and Benares followed suit.

Three months later, on December 15, 1970, the Supreme Court pronounced judgement. "The Order is illegal," it stated The Presidential Order was declared *ultra vires* of the Constitution Out of the eleven members of the full Constitutional Bench, the majority view held that the Union Government could not arbitrarily deprive the Indian Princes of the special privileges they had been accorded for historical reasons

The Supreme Court verdict was hailed as a landmark in constitutional law. It was, many declared, a triumph of democracy. But the princes were

not to enjoy their victory for long.

On the same day as the verdict, an excited Lok Sabha was told by an adamant Prime Minister that the Government stood by its commitment to abolish the Privy Purse and privileges. Twelve days later, on December 27, 1970, Parliament was dissolved. In a broadcast to the nation that night, Indira Gandhi said that the Union Cabinet had decided to go in for a mid-term poll because their concern was "...not merely with remaining in power but with the using of that power to ensure a better life to the vast majority of our people and satisfy their aspirations for a just social order." Her government's decision to nationalise the banks, set up a Monopolies Commission and attempt to abolish the Privy Purse were endeavors towards accelerating the pace of socio-economic reforms. "...Reactionary forces have not hesitated to obstruct in every possible way the proper implementation of these urgent and vitally necessary measures," she declared.

As the dates for the mid-term poll of 1971 approached, Karni Singh seriously considered stepping down from parliamentary duties and not running for another term. He had often stated that two terms was the maximum that any one individual ought to occupy a seat in Parliament, and that a younger person would be better able to serve the constituency The Privy Purses abolition drama, with the government 'going back on its promises', added to Karni Singh's frame of mind.

Besides all this, the death of a group of trusted aides and staff in an accident earlier that year in January 1970, had been a particularly devastating experience. On the morning of January 21, 1970, a group of Karni Singh's aides met with a serious accident on the Ganganagar-Sangaria road, when their jeep collided with a bus They were in the advance vehicle of a larger party led by Karni Singh himself, enroute from Ganganagar to visit the injured victims of police firings at Sangaria, Bhadra and Churu — all part of erstwhile Bikaner state, and of Karni Singh's parliamentary constituency. The visit was also in the nature of an inspection of the sites and a fact-finding mission.

The advance vehicle had left Ganganagar very early in the morning. Aboard it were Rajvi Ridmal Singh — a very close associate and long-standing public relations officer of his Maharaja, Thakur Megh Singh — another long-term associate, who was also part of Karni Singh's Ganaganagar Farm management, and Karni Singh's public relations officer for Ganganagar district, and Thakur Swarup Singh — the Maharaja's

public relations officer for Churu district and a close associate, and like the other two a member of Bikaner's old nobility. Also part of the party were Jagpal Singh — a promising young man who had worked for some years in the Rajmata's Office, Hamid — another young man, who was the son of Rahim, a long-standing member of the Household Staff, and Gahad Singh — who had retired from the army and was a member of the Palace Bodyguards.

A heavy, impregnable, fog lay across the plains that morning. Driving towards Sangaria, the jeep had a head-on collision with a bus-load carrying a group of conscientious objectors — *'satyagrahis'* — who had been arrested previously and were being brought from Bharatpur jail for release. Five of the jeep passengers died on the spot, the sixth a short while later at the Ganganagar Hospital.

Following, a little later, the rest of the vehicles including the one in which Karni Singh was sitting, drove to Sangaria in thick fog, oblivious of the fact that their companions had met with an accident. They obviously passed the accident site, but due to poor visibility were not aware of what had occurred It was only upon reaching Sangaria that a search began and the tragedy became known to Karni Singh.

The Maharaja was shattered. He reached Ganganagar Hospital with his staff and necessary arrangements were made for the last rites to be conducted at Bikaner. Like the others, Karni Singh did return to his work in time. The postponed visit to the sites of the firing and the victims was made later in February 1970, and other parliamentary duties resumed. Those close to Karni Singh knew, however, that his heart was no longer in politics, and were not really surprised when after the call for fresh elections was given in December 1970, eleven months later, they learnt that he was considering not contesting.

The public, however, still supported him wholeheartedly and wanted him to stand again. They knew that he worked hard at representing their interests in Parliament and took pride in the fact that their MP was an international-level shooter who gave full attention to both his tasks without in any way compromising the working standards of either 'career'. Someone else who was keen that Karni Singh stand for election once again was his mother, the Rajmata.

Rajmata Sudarshan Kumari was a remarkable woman, with a highly developed notion of dedication to duty and to the 'people' of Bikaner. "My grandmother was an active and avid politician and supported the Swatantra

Party and the Jan Sangh," states Rajyashree Kumari. "She was a great influence on my father and helped his campaigns immensely. She had a shrewd knowledge of people and knew how to win them to her way of thinking. Despite the fact that she was in complete *purdah*, she managed to organise all the ladies who used to come to see her and even the men, the local leaders of the opposition parties, were summoned when the need arose. She then used to sit in one room while they sat in the next and all sorts of plans were made and topics were discussed through those open doors."

Given the insistence of his mother, Karni Singh finally agreed to contest the elections. In a by now predictably familiar scenario, in March 1971 he was effortlessly re-elected to the Lok Sabha yet again. This was to be his fifth consecutive term as an MP.

In the same elections of March 1971, contesting on the slogan of *'Garibi hatao'* — eradication of poverty — and other promised reforms, the Congress party returned to power with a thumping majority. The Prime Minister stated she had received a clear mandate from the people *to go ahead with the implementation of her party's manifesto.* The fate of the princes was now clearly written on the walls.

The expected bombshell came in December. In a letter to the Maharaja of Dhrangadhra dated December 1, 1971, Indira Gandhi informed him, "...tomorrow I am introducing the 26th Amendment to the Constitution. With its adoption the Princely Order will come to a termination You have described it as a 'tragic and inglorious' closing of a chapter. I can understand your anguish, but I see neither tragedy nor ignomy."

The very next day, December 2, the Constitution 26th Amendment Bill was moved in the Lok Sabha for consideration The debate lasted a scant four hours. In an emotional speech, Baroda's Fateh Singh Rao Gaekwad reminded Parliament that, "Twenty-two years ago on this very floor we were referred to as co-architects of Indian independence. Today we are branded an anachronism and reactionaries obstructing the path of building an egalitarian society...". "The Rulers", he concluded, "are quite content to face the verdict both of justice and history."

A short while later, the Constitution 26th Amendment Bill was adopted by the Lok Sabha by 381 votes to 6. One week later, in the midst of the Indo-Pakistan war, the Rajya Sabha also passed it by 167 votes to 7. On the 28th of the same month, as 1971 drew to a close, the President of India, V.V. Giri, gave his assent to the Constitution 26th Amendment

Bill. It was, indeed, the end of an era.

Henceforth, Maharaja Karni Singh, the 23rd ruler of Bikaner in the line of Rao Bika, was entitled to use no title other than the 'Dr.' he had earned for his Ph.D. Interestingly enough, however, when Karni Singh returned to Bikaner for the first time after the de-recognition of the Indian rulers, he found a crowd of over 50,000 people awaiting him at the Bikaner railway station. As he disembarked, cheers of *'Maharaja-saheb ri jai ho'* — Long Live the Maharaja — rent the air and mingled with the fragrance of the thousands of garlands with which the people surged forward to greet him. It was an emotional moment of re-assertation of faith.

The abolition of Privy Purses hurt. More so because it was a breach of faith. However, as Karni Singh had realised a long time ago, "...living on the Privy Purses was like living on borrowed time." Once the protracted struggle over their abolition had been resolved, Karni Singh felt as if "...the sword of Damocles that was hanging over our heads had finally been lifted." The abolition, he told Charles Allen in an interview, "...really made men out of the Princes. It consequently brought the best out of us, to be able to stand on our own two legs and face the world by the Grace of God and the blessings of our ancestors."

In the years that the debate was continuing, Karni Singh had written a small booklet entitled *A Break-up of Privy Purse* for circulation among MPs "Many friends in Parliament have asked me for a break up of the Privy Purse of Rulers," he began. "I am, therefore, circulating whatever information I could gather in a short time. "

"...There is much misunderstanding in the minds of the people about how the Privy Purses of the Rulers are utilised. This note is designed to convey the correct picture. While the Ruler draws the Privy Purse in his personal name, the dependent members and a large retinue directly benefit from this. It is a fact that a Ruler, for example, drawing a Privy Purse of Rs. 10 lacs would be employing on an average of 600 to 700 people counting permanent and temporary employees. If taken at five heads per family it means over three thousand people draw their sustenance from the Privy Purse Thus roughly an amount of Rs 4 lacs is paid as their salary alone from this Privy Purse"

"When the Integration of States took place, there were many States which were large and received Privy Purses in excess of Rs. 10 lacs On the death of such Rulers these Privy Purses dropped in most cases to Rs

10 lacs e.g. in Rajasthan alone in the case of Bikaner (1950 September), Jodhpur (1951 January) and Jaipur (July 1970) from their original of Rs. 17 lacs, 17½ lacs and 18 lacs respectively. The Privy Purse of Udaipur was also reduced on the demise of the late Maharana."

"There were no taxes like Income-tax, Wealth-tax, etc., when the integration of the States took place, in most of the Former States Areas Today it is so much that Rulers who draw Privy Purse of Rs. 10 lacs for example are paying Wealth tax and Income tax totalling from Rs. 3 to 15 lacs yearly. It would be correct to say that in terms of purchasing power a 10 lacs Privy Purse in 1950 is no more than 2½ lacs today.. While Dearness and Salaries have been increasing steadily during the last twenty years, the Privy Purse has remained constant and in the case of many rulers it has been reduced by the death of the father who signed the merger agreement and to this additional burden of Wealth tax, Income tax and other taxes have been added..."

The booklet continued that, "...Charities are tied up with various ancient traditions in the States and these are obligatory. Same is the case with ceremonies like the Gangaur Procession, Dashera, Holi, Diwali, Navratri etc., in Rajasthan and many places. Badberas or Kumbhkalas is a typical ceremony where the Kalas is carried by the women who come in thousands to receive the Ruler and a rupee per Kalas should be dropped according to the custom. This custom has been there for centuries and cannot be stopped by the whims of the Ruler..."

"...In my personal case ever since my election to Parliament since 1952, my entire income as a Parliament Member has been given to poor students as Scholarship and nearly 120 poor students are reading on this scholarship alone every year. It is a fact that over a lac of rupees have been spent on this account alone. ."

"...Much has been said about privileges. While these are not enumerated here, it can, however, be stated that the privileges enjoyed by a section of people, like MPs, Ministers etc., can be easily compared with some of the privileges enjoyed by the Rulers..."

"At the time of integration of Bikaner State although a desert State handed over nearly 1000 miles of Railways, whose capitalised value would run to Rs 30 to 40 crores over 1000 sq miles of irrigated land and the Gang Canal and an army of 4000 people, well equipped besides cash amounting to about Rs. 4 1/2 crores to the Government. Like Bikaner, similar contributions were made by other States also to their

respective Governments".

"Bikaner was the first State in Rajasthan to have a High Court in the year 1922 and the first in Rajasthan to have a Legislative Assembly in the year 1913. What was true of Bikaner was true of many other progressive States dotted over the entire country with enlightened and progressive Rulers; for example, Gwalior alone gave enough in cash balances to the Government at the time of integration from whose interest alone the Government could meet the yearly Privy Purses of the Rulers. The Progressive Rulers of Baroda, Bhav Nagar, Bikaner, Dhrangdhara, Gwalior, Jaipur, Jam Nagar, Jodhpur, Mysore, Travancore and numerous others are well known today."

"India in her centuries of history had changed from one political system to another and is presently going through a very difficult period trying to save democracy and to preserve a secular State. The princes have played a honourable part in the unification of the country. The Privy Purses and the privileges given to them as Former Heads of States should be considered with this aspect as a background, and at best can be called a 'SMALL — I purposely use the word SMALL — price we have paid for the bloodless revolution which has affected the destinies of millions of our people' (quotation from Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel)."

"It would be fair to warn brother Members that when voting takes place on this controversial Bill and honest pledges made by no less a person than the great Jawaharlal Nehru, the father of the present Prime Minister, are to be thrown away to the winds it would do well to remember that it will not only be the 279 odd Rulers who will be affected but perhaps more adversely affected will be the one lac or more employees who draw their sustenance from the Privy Purse some of them too old even to be re-employed." (For an approximate break-up see appendix).

In later years, Karni Singh was to introspect deeply, and reiterate that for the Indian princes it was necessary to steer clear of party politics by not aligning themselves with one side or another. It was his firmly held view that it was only after the princes joined India's opposition parties in large numbers from the late 1960s onwards that the party in power took measures to curb the privileges constitutionally granted and guaranteed to the Indian princes. The abolition of titles and cutting of Privy Purses through constitutional amendments was, in his opinion, the final outcome of this.

Almost at the same time as the abolition of Privy Purses, Karni Singh

suffered a far greater loss with the demise of his mother, Rajmata Sudarshan Kumari of Bikaner on December 19.

While the long, painful drama of abolition of princely privileges was being played out on the one hand, by the winter of 1971, tension between India and Pakistan had also reached flash-point. War broke out between the two countries on December 3, 1971, and Karni Singh, on a short visit to Bombay, promptly took a flight back to Delhi to join Parliament Not surprisingly, in view of the bombing of Indian aerodromes, the entire plane had only about half a dozen other co-passengers.

Immediately upon landing, Karni Singh spoke at Parliament, offering to join the Indian Air Force as a volunteer along with all the other members of Parliament who were offering other kinds of war services. "Having flown in my earlier years and having had a pilot's licence it had always been my dream to join the Air Force," he admitted on tape later. Once again, however, as had been the case in 1942, Karni Singh's dream of flying sortees for the Air Force never materialised.

Soon after reaching Delhi, the Maharaja received a telephone call from his mother who was at Bikaner, asking him to come to Bikaner and be with the people of his constituency since the region was being bombed Karni Singh proceeded to Bikaner, which was only about 70 miles from the international border between India and Pakistan, and remained there throughout the duration of the Indo-Pak war.

Though the city of Bikaner was never bombed, the aerodrome which was ten miles from the city received a blast of 47 bombs, though all of them missed important targets and even missed the airport runway

Air-raid alerts had become routine during these days. On the morning of December 17, the Maharaja's secretary, Dalip Singh, buzzed him over the intercom at about 4 a.m., and asked him to "run like hell" as there was an air-raid alert. Although air-raid shelters had been prepared in the garden, the Maharaja was much too sleepy to "run like hell" in the biting chill of the desert dawn. In any case, he commented later, "No one took the alerts seriously anyway." He therefore asked his secretary to get into the shelter and call him again if the bombs fell any closer.

He had just fallen asleep again when the intercom buzzed once again. Expecting a bomb practically over his head from the persistent cacophony of the intercom, the Maharaja got a much greater shock when he heard his secretary inform him that the Rajmata had suddenly been taken ill

Karni Singh had dined with his mother only the previous evening, and she had been her usual happy self. He immediately rushed to her apartment and found that the Rajmata had gone into coma. She never recovered, and in the early hours of December 19, 1971 she breathed her last. Her death was a great shock to the entire family, more so because of its suddenness. For Karni Singh it was a particularly shattering blow as he had been very close to his mother.

Not just the whole family, but almost all of Bikaner grieved at the death of the Rajmata of Bikaner. Rajmata Sudarshan Kumari had truly served her people well in the nearly fifty years that had passed since she had first come to Bikaner as a young bride. There was an irony in the timing of her death, for she died a Princess and a Rajmata, just days before the presidential order set the seal of approval on the Constitution 26th Amendment Bill, depriving Indian princes of their titles.

Karni Singh had always been particularly close to his mother, and he decided that he would perform all the associated ceremonies and final rites with his own hands. He walked with her bier all the way to the royal cremation grounds 6 km. away at Devi Kund Sagar, lit the funeral pyre with his own hands, and performed all the religious ceremonies, including the *shraddha* ceremonies, that custom deemed were essential.

In her Will, the Rajmata bequeathed almost her entire property and possessions towards charity. This final gesture on her part was characteristic of her intensely magnanimous, philanthropic and religious-minded personality, and her family were happy about it.

The war had ended about the same time as the Rajmata passed away, and Karni Singh, having lost his mother and his titles in the same month, returned to his duties as a Parliamentarian.

By now, it was getting on for almost twenty years since Karni Singh had been elected to Parliament and twenty-five years since India had attained Independence. Despite an overall sense of pride at Indian achievements in many fields, an aura of disenchantment had begun to pervade the air.

Like many others, Karni Singh too was troubled by the overall state of affairs, in particular the declining standard of politics in India and problems like corruption and over-population In an exclusive interview (in response to a questionnaire given to him by Raj Kapila), recorded on July 13, 1972, Karni Singh expressed his views at the India of 1972 in a forthright manner.

"If you look at Indian politics today," he stated, "I can sum it up under one heading — frustration! Whether it is a rich man or a poor man, he is frustrated. There is immense student unrest in the country; the youth is in revolt. Unemployment, poverty, corruption in politics, are things that are really beginning to bother us. I can say that hardly any comparison exists between the India of 1947 and the India of 1972. Today, a politician is out only for himself. Very few are concerned with the politics that lead to a greater India. Today, ...if you meet India's top leadership it may not give you the same feeling of confidence as you would have got twenty-five years ago."

"...Everytime Parliament meets, the country waits expectantly, wondering what new measures will be brought in, how they would be affected, how their homes and family lives will be affected, how they'll be able to meet their budgets, how the new taxation is expected to affect them Many of these fears hang in the minds of the people ... The over-population which we have failed to check adequately is creating a problem on its own, whereby millions of young men and women are going about unemployed, frustrated and angry. This angry youth is a dangerous phenomenon anywhere in the world. Japan has been able to control its population. So can India. But will we? Will our politicians have the guts to stand up on public platforms and speak to the masses, convincing them that . . [this] is the only way that India can achieve prosperity? The only way by which our millions can be fed, given shelter, and a higher standard of living achieved for our poor."

"...Twenty years ago, when I was elected as an Independent in the Opposition, I had hardly any problems. In fact, if there were any problems relating to my constituency I had only to take them to Jawaharlal Nehru or any of the great ministers and they always gave the matter their considered thought. Today, the first question is, do you belong to the ruling party? Do you toe the line of the ruling party? ... For the last twenty years I have hammered away on the floor of Parliament the needs of my area. Why has this area not been industrialised? Why is it that in the time of the former States a thousand miles of railways were added and after Independence close to only a dozen miles have been added [upto mid 1972]?"

He also had reservations about the usefulness of communism for India, and expressed his fear that, "...in the garb of socialism and the garb of extreme radicalism, India is moving slowly but surely towards the goal

of communism." Yet another openly voiced concern was about the manner in which according to his perception, step by step, the state was encroaching on the fundamental rights and personal liberties of an individual He feared that a stage could come when the judiciary would be so corrupt that, "...to receive justice as we know it, as we understand it, and as it was enshrined in the Constitution of our country will be almost something we can forget about. That, indeed, would be a sad day." (In fact, in a sense, as early as 1972, Karni Singh practically forecast the '75 Emergency).

"...Is it necessary in a democracy that everybody in Parliament or the State Assembly belong to the ruling party?" he queried. "If you believe in democracy, you must believe in an opposition. If you believe in an opposition, then the needs of the people, be they from the ruling party areas or the opposition areas must be treated at par and everybody's interests equated... I would like India's politicians to treat all the States and regions and divisions and districts on par, and try and develop each and every part of this country equally, as if all of them were a large family...[to be] meted out equal justice and equal treatment."

Regarding the land ceiling and ceiling on urban property, the M.P from Bikaner was of the view that, "It is inevitable that a land ceiling policy will come. ...As the population increases, a stage may come when land holdings will become so uneconomical that government will have to think of some other way! But as far as urban property ceiling is concerned, I think it is totally absurd and uncalled for! With the present-day science and technology, there should be no need for peoples' homes to be taken away, when all we have to do is construct upwards "

"...I can understand that the government may, as a socialistic policy, try to impose control on too much urban land held by an Indian citizen...but I don't think that taking away our houses will solve the acute problem of shortage of housing for the poor people. Before an urban property ceiling is imposed, I would like very much for the government to show to people by ministers giving up their palatial homes which are maintained at state expense. If they want that every citizen should own three rooms, then a minister should also own three rooms — and whether that be at state expense or his/her own is immaterial!"

In the years that followed, there were times when Karni Singh was convinced that the former rulers were specially targeted. He remembered only too clearly a meeting at New Delhi in 1972 to which the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, had invited the Opposition leaders, and where the

Antiquities Act had been introduced. Karni Singh, a member of the Opposition delegation, reached the venue slightly before time and found himself seated right opposite the Prime Minister.

"She opened," he recalled, "by saying 'Gentlemen, there is nothing very serious we have to discuss today One [of the issues] is the salaries of the judges — and we are increasing the salaries of the Supreme Court judges; and the other one', (and she immediately looked at me), 'was this thing about the Antiquities Act'. And I realised that the people who would be the worst hit would be the former Maharajas."

Sometime afterwards, on February 19, 1973, Bikaner had witnessed the pageantry and joy of a royal wedding, when Maharaja Karni Singh's older daughter, Rajyashree Kumari, married Mayurdhwaj Sinhji Gohel, the son of Sir Jaywant Sinhji Gohel (C.B.E.) of Palitana Over a year and a bit later, on December 10, 1974, the Maharaja's younger daughter, Madhulika Kumari, married Yuvraj Rajvir Singh of Maliya at another glittering well-attended ceremony.

In the intervening period, the long-postponed date for the religious ceremony known as *Gaya shraddha*, to be performed for the soul of his mother fell due. Karni Singh, like his father before him, had never been a particularly religious man in the orthodox sense of the word. His mother, on the other hand, had always been deeply religious, laying particular stress on meditation and concentration *(dhyana)*, though she too had never cared for *pujas*, rituals and religious formalities. Karni Singh thus resolved that he would personally perform the ceremony of *Gaya shraddha* for his mother at the holy pilgrimage site of Gaya in Bihar.

The ceremony was arranged for October 15, 1974. Of course, according to past practice, the Bikaner family's Brahmin priests would officiate at this ceremony, but for Karni Singh it seemed necessary that he be present at Gaya on the appointed day. As the day approached, plans began to go awry. He went down with a severe attack of flu and it was doubtful whether he would be fit enough to travel.

Karni Singh recovered enough to attempt the journey, and as planned got into his car to drive to Delhi on the 13th. A bare hundred yards from the palace the car came to a dead stop. Every effort to start the car failed, and by the time alternative arrangements were made, it had wrecked the rest of the schedule. As a result, an unhappy Karni Singh was left sitting in Bikaner, while at Gaya his brother, Amar Singh, performed the *shraddha* his older brother had so very much looked forward to performing with his

own hands.

As the time for the ceremony drew near, he went into his mother's room. This had been preserved since her demise, and prayers were offered here regularly. Karni Singh sat there and for the next hour or so concentrated with his entire being, imagining that he was present at Gaya, even though his physical body was at Bikaner, and that he and his brother were performing the ceremony together. Later that same day, he recorded his anguish at missing the Gaya *shraddha* on a cassette-tape.

Barring this, however, at the beginning of 1975 Karni Singh was as happy and contented a man as any. He was doing well in his 'parallel career' of shooting, having won the silver medal in Clay Pigeon Traps and the bronze in Skeet at the recently concluded 7th Asian Games held at Tehran in August-September 1974. And he was continuing to speak out on all issues close to his heart on the floor of Parliament. He also revelled in being a grandfather to three lovely granddaughters — Narendra Singh's daughters, Daksha Kumari (b. July 13, 1972) and Siddhi Kumari (b October 6, 1973), and Rajyashree's daughter Anupama Kumari (b. April 24, 1974). The only 'flaw' to a perfect world at this point was the fact that after her marriage, Rajyashree had moved to England, where her husband and his parents lived.

If all was well with his personal world, however, the same was not the case with India. Karni Singh was in Europe when he learnt that a state of Emergency had been declared in India in June 1975.

"The Emergency came as no great shock to me," he recorded on a tape, "having been in Parliament for the last 25 years and having seen the last few years of Mrs. Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, and having forecasted in one of my speeches in Parliament that if India went in the direction that it was [going], I had no doubt in my mind that we would take the same lonely road that Hitler took towards exterminations and gas chambers. However, the exact shape and the rapidity with which Mrs. Gandhi acted following the Allahabad High Court decision certainly was more than I expected."

The news of the Emergency was given to Karni Singh on June 26, by Kanti Desai, the son of Morarji Desai, who also informed him about the arrest and imprisonment of many of India's prominent politicians "I knew that we were going to walk a lonely path," Karni Singh expressed "The motivation was bad, the timing was even worse! Had Mrs. Gandhi brought in the Emergency say 6 months earlier than the Allahabad High

Court decision, I have no doubt that it would have been welcomed, but coming as it did a few days after the Allahabad High Court decision which went against her, left no doubt in anybody's mind that the motivation was strictly personal, and that whatever was done was to protect the Nehru dynasty in power."

Karni Singh and his wife had left Bombay for England only a couple of days earlier. He claimed later that he "...had a foreboding that Mrs Gandhi was going to act in some strange way. I had no doubt that she would never step down because to her the hunger for power had become too important The fact that she was pushing her son up into the limelight had further left no doubt regarding the shape of things to come"

Sitting in England, as Karni Singh took in the news, he came to the conclusion that the Emergency was a desperate step. He felt ashamed that such a thing had happened in Nehru's India; in Mahatma Gandhi's India; and he was doubly ashamed that such a step had been taken by the daughter of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

The Emergency and accompanying press censorship was viewed very critically in Britain. Although Karni Singh was receiving Indian newspapers every day, there was not much news coming through in the papers, and he had to depend on the BBC and the British press to learn what was happening in India. Soon after this, Karni Singh heard that the Rajmata of Jaipur had been imprisoned It seemed to him that something akin to a reign of terror had been unleashed in India, and that a lot of atrocities were taking place.

The Maharaja and his wife decided that they had to return to India as soon as possible. The return-journey was temporarily delayed while Karni Singh underwent a minor operation to remove a polyp from his intestine at the London Clinic. Two weeks after coming out of hospital, the couple left for Delhi. Upon landing at Delhi's airport they noticed tremendously increased efficiency, and it was evident that the Emergency had toned up the administration to some extent, but to Karni Singh, it seemed as if there was fear and apprehension in almost every face he saw.

The Maharaja and Maharani reached their Delhi residence and were told that, in view of the fact that almost all the opposition members had been imprisoned, the family members had been expecting the arrest of the Maharaja upon arrival in Delhi. Karni Singh went to Parliament House straight away, and finding that Parliament had just risen *sine die*, went on

constitutionally committed to democracy and individual liberty, and her people would need to decide if good government at the tail-end of a whip was more desirable to self-government. Given a choice, he declared, personally he would choose a self-government.

He often met many of his friends from the Congress party and discussed the existing situation. He was personally of the view that the Emergency should be discontinued after six months, because that was the only way India could convince the world that the Emergency had been declared for reasons of discipline and national interest, and not for the benefit of one individual and family. He also warned them that measures like the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), Defence of India Rules, and innumerable other draconian laws and acts that were being promulgated would be used against the very government that had enacted them, and possibly with double the force, once elections were held and political power switched hands.

Karni Singh felt unless immediate remedial steps were taken, what had begun as a kind of witch-hunt during the Emergency would be taken up by future governments. In such a scenario, he predicted, no government could retire or be thrown out of power without the fear of retaliatory actions by its successor, through the opening up of old cases and the fear of being put on trial. He found it strange that many of his Congress friends could not even visualise that a switch was in the offing.

When Parliament re-assembled, Karni Singh, along with several other members, decided to take no part in the deliberations since they were not prepared to support dictatorial policies. There was, consequently, a virtual boycott by Opposition members, including Karni Singh, as hardly anyone attended proceedings.

When the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Bill came up, the Opposition members were 'informed' that their absence would be noticed if they did not attend Parliament and support the amendment. Several of Karni Singh's friends urged him to support the 42nd Amendment, pleading that it would be in the interest of his family and himself to do so. Karni Singh decided, however, that he could not bring himself to vote with the government on a draconian measure that he believed was bad for his country. Thus, he did not attend Parliament nor participate in the voting. Of course, the motion was carried with hardly any votes against it.

Even though Karni Singh did not have to face the indignity of being

imprisoned, the take-over of Gajner lake and its outer preserve by the government in 1975 was something akin to a body blow for him. It was not the prestige of ownership that mattered to him. Rather, what hurt unbearably was the shattering of memories; memories of another, different age going back to his earliest years.

Every member of the Bikaner family was upset at the taking-over of a place that had been in their possession for two hundred years. Situated about 20 miles south-west of the capital city of Bikaner, Gajner had been 'founded' by Maharaja Gaj Singh and added to during the reign of Maharaja Surat Singh. With a lake that attracted thousands of wild fowl in the winter season, and gardens and orchards stocked with fruit trees and ornamental shrubs, Gajner had always held a special attraction for the ruling house of Bikaner. During the 20th century, four generations, from Maharaja Ganga Singh down to Karni Singh's children, nephews and nieces, had grown to love the place. And just like Karni Singh, every single one of them had his or her own favourite spots and special memories of Gajner.

Maharaja Ganga Singh had loved Gajner so very much that he had expressed a wish to be cremated these upon his death, rather than at the family cremation grounds at Devi Kund Sagar In fact, he had even chosen a site on the high grounds of Gajner, overlooking the lake and the palace, and built an enclosure which he hoped would one day house his cenotaph. Ironically, the enclosure was fated to remain empty For, upon Maharaja Ganga Singh's demise, the more traditional nobles felt that it would be incorrect and improper to break with custom and, therefore, the funeral had to take place at the traditionally accepted royal cremation grounds of Devi Kund Sagar near Bikaner. In addition to this, the sheer logistics of how so many mourners would walk with the cortege all the way from Bikaner to Gajner were overwhelming, and eventually, the Maharaja's funeral ceremonies were performed at Devi Kund, rather than at his beloved Gajner.

The take-over move was not wholly unexpected, however Simultaneously, lands belonging to former princes was being acquired all over the country by the government. In the case of Gajner, a notice was received from the District Collector saying that under the Land Acquisition Act (which the government had brought in retrospectively by thirteen years), Gajner was to be taken over.

Gajner had never been used as agricultural property. Furthermore, since the Land Acquisition Act contained a clause that no land which is within a fencing can be taken, and excepting for a few portions Gajner was totally within fencing, Karni Singh took necessary legal steps. These were followed by protracted negotiations as a result of which it was decided that the government would acquire the lake and the outer preserve, leaving the sports complex area which the Bikaner family had laid out, the buildings and the main property of the palace at Gajner in the possession of the former Maharaja of Bikaner. Karni Singh was keen that the land taken over outside the sports complex be created into a game sanctuary by the Government of Rajasthan. The Rajasthan State Government eventually acquiesced to this proposal.

Karni Singh continued negotiating with the district administration and the government during 1967-77, and even wrote a letter to the Prime Minister protesting against the take-over of Gajner. Some of the other former rulers challenged the act as used against them in court, on the grounds that it was discriminatory applying only to the twenty-two rulers of Rajasthan. In the meantime, while Gajner also became yet another case for the Compensation Commissioner's Court, Karni Singh was pained to receive reports about the lack of maintenance of the acquired property on the part of the government, specially when one part of the lake breached in 1976.

Once the property had been acquired, it began to be used like a picnic ground by certain government personnel. Insensitive to the fact that only the outer preserves and not the palaces had been taken-over, these people, accompanied by friends and families, took to intruding upon the privacy of the former ruling family at the Gajner palaces. Faced with this, Karni Singh opted to close down Gajner temporarily and convert the portion known as Gulab Niwas into a small hotel.

While all this was going on, the Emergency continued. If he had been shocked at the sudden declaration of the Emergency, the Maharaja was no less surprised to be informed that it was ending early one January morning in 1977. "My son-in-law, Mr. Gohel, and I were sitting out in the garden and enjoying the warm winter sunshine when Dalip Singh walked up and said that the Prime Minister had dissolved Parliament and ordered elections in six weeks. Both Mayur and I looked at each other," he recorded.

Karni Singh could not refrain from wondering aloud how any sensible person could have so misjudged the situation in India. He believed the Prime Minister had taken the sullen atmosphere as popular acquiescence towards getting a mandate to govern the country for a further five years. Karni Singh told his son-in-law that in his mind there was no doubt that the Emergency would be virtually over once public speeches were permitted. He felt that open criticism of the Emergency by public figures would give a feeling of self-confidence to the Indian masses, and once the suppressed voices of India spoke out collectively, the long night of Emergency would retreat.

Soon after, while on the one hand, Mr. Jagjivan Ram took the step of quitting Indira Gandhi's Cabinet to join the Opposition, the leaders of the different parties that formed the Opposition in Parliament came together to form the Janata Party. Karni Singh felt a sense of self-righteousness at this unified move on the part of the different political parties. He had long been a vocal advocate of a two-party system as an option to an uninterrupted rule by any single party, and he believed that the newly formed Janata Party would provide a viable alternative to the existing ruling party.

"I would like to say with a little bit of pardonable pride," he stated on tape, "that for the past ten years in Parliament I had been continually urging upon Opposition leaders to form one Socialist Democratic Party which would be able to come to power, because year after year Indira Gandhi's government, whether in the States or the Centre, had won and come to power on a minority vote; the Opposition votes being split in three or four cornered contests. This went on for ten years all along, and I had become quite unpopular with the Opposition leaders for my continuously mentioning that 'Congress was in power by the grace of the Opposition'!"

With the dissolution of Parliament and call for fresh elections, Karni Singh decided that it was time that the people of Bikaner constituency chose a new Member to return to Parliament. "My first reaction to the dissolution of Parliament was one of relief, because I had for some time felt that a time had come when the people had to choose a new MP, and that in principle it was wrong for any man to occupy a seat in the Lok Sabha for more than ten years — twenty five being long enough," he said He was thus determined not to contest the Lok Sabha elections ever again.

Interestingly, those close to him believe that if his mother, Rajmata Sudarshan Kumari, had been alive she would never have let him leave politics. "Even though Bikaner had been merged long ago, our mother always stressed the fact that, ruler or not, *'Bhai'* had a duty to perform to the people of Bikaner," recalls Karni Singh's younger brother, Amar Singh

The people of Bikaner were as aware of his intense commitment to his constituents throughout his Parliamentary career as were his friends and colleagues. His older daughter remembers that, "When at home with us he was busy from early morning to late at night with his work as the Independent Member of Parliament for the Bikaner constituency. He seriously took up the problems of his constituents with ministers and government departments. He was as dedicated in his love for the people of Bikaner and to their problems as he was in his love for his family We sensed his strong commitment to the people of Bikaner, and we sensed the love of the people for him."

Since he had been a strong supporter of the opposition during his twenty-five years as a Member of Parliament, Karni Singh did not wish to be burdened with the onus of influencing the forthcoming elections one way or another. Furthermore, he recorded, "My son was a supporter of Mrs. Gandhi's Youth Congress and at that stage he was convinced that his step was correct, although I did not personally think so. But then if you believe in democracy, everyone has a right, even within a family, to hold their own views. I was told that due to my strong support of the opposition in the last twenty-five years the family members were being given a raw deal, and I decided that since I was not going to run for this Parliament — and this decision had been taken as far back as 1971, when I had contested the 5th election only because of my mother's insistence — that I would not stay in Bikaner, but would go to Delhi so that nobody could blame me for having influenced the elections one way or another; whatever that influence was worth."

He therefore spent the campaigning period at Delhi, far away from his erstwhile constituents. During this period considerable pressure was brought on him and his family members to support the ruling party The Prime Minister who had been so elusive in giving appointments a few short months ago, was now sending the Maharaja messages through common acquaintances asking him (and others like him), to go out into the districts

and canvas for her party. Karni Singh clarified that it was not possible for him to do any canvassing as he had unequivocally retired from a parliamentary career. Furthermore, since he had supported the opposition in Parliament for the past quarter of a century, his sympathies lay with the Opposition!

He finally decided to return to Bikaner two days before the polling. Karni Singh had promised the Janata party candidate, Chaudhary Hari Ram, that regardless of what others did, he would personally cast his own vote in the Chaudhary's favour. Polling was to begin on March 16, 1977, and so Karni Singh's car left Delhi on the morning of the 14th. Driving through Haryana, the travellers came across a large procession along with an upsurge of people canvassing for votes on behalf of the Congress candidate, Bansi Lal, at Bhiwani. It took half-an-hour to negotiate through the crowds at Bhiwani. Karni Singh was told that the Congress candidate stood to win in Bhiwani town, but the villages were uncertain.

The travellers drove on non-stop to Bikaner from Bhiwani, a distance of 210 miles, arriving at Bikaner at around 5 p m. As Karni Singh got out of the car, an aide passed him a local newspaper. The newspaper carried a photograph of Karni Singh. Alongside the photograph was a message from the Maharaja, saying that he was held up in Delhi due to ill-health, but was requesting the people of Bikaner to give full support to the Congress candidate and cast their votes in favour of the 'the cow and calf' symbol of Indira Gandhi's Congress party.

Karni Singh was taken aback and furious He immediately prepared a contradiction to the newspaper item, and having signed it, had it sent round at *once to the different candidates who were standing for elections* from the Janata, Congress and Communist parties The signed contradiction stated that Karni Singh, who was absolutely well, had just returned from Delhi and seen the clipping which had shocked him profoundly. To say that he was supporting the Congress was totally false He also asked that a clarification be brought out reiterating the same thing as soon as possible. It is ironic that if the former Maharaja had not driven back to Bikaner without stopping, he would have arrived too late to issue a contradiction that would have reached the far-flung parts of his erstwhile constituency in time.

The next morning, Karni Singh was innundated by visitors, among

them the Congress (I) party nominee and his son. The public citizens informed the Maharaja that the Bikaner public had been extremely surprised with they had heard that their Maharaja, who for twenty-five years had supported the Opposition as an Independent Member of Parliament, had suddenly opted to lend his support to the Congress (I) party. Someone even whipped out a pamphlet brought out by Indira Gandhi's party. This pamphlet also carried a picture of Maharaja Karni Singh along with a signed message, more or less on the same lines as the news clipping that Karni Singh had seen the previous evening. Beneath the message was printed the 'cow and calf' symbol of the Congress (I).

Karni Singh explained to everyone, including the Congress nominee, that as he had always stood as an Independent in Parliament, and while in the present instance his personal sympathies lay with the Opposition, he had deliberately decided not to canvass for any candidate, since it was a family tradition not to take sides. The people of Bikaner appreciated this stand from the man who had once been anointed as the Maharaja of Bikaner. They had long acknowledged that Karni Singh had worked to uphold the principles of democracy, both before and after the abolition of his title and royal privileges.

Early on the morning of March 16, 1977, Karni Singh cast his ballot, and like thousands of others in the country, awaited the results. When the votes were counted, it became apparent that the people of India had decided against the twenty months of Emergency, with northern India showing unhesitating support for the Janata Party alliance. The Emergency was truly over.

As the results started pouring in, Karni Singh went over the events of the past two years in his mind. He was certain that the Indian people had rejected not the Congress Party as such, but the twenty months of Emergency, which had personified oppression and autocracy The notion of the 'illiterate Indian voter' now belonged to the past. In the future every government would have to prove itself to return to power. Furthermore, the fact that the transition of government was conducted through the established democratic process of elections, implied that the future of democracy and the Indian Republic was safe. Whether the out-going Prime Minister ever again returned to power or not in the years to come would depend on how the voters evaluated her come next election time.

The former Member of Parliament, at long last, was no longer bound,

as he had been for the past quarter of a century, by Parliament sessions, bills, debates and the like. He could now devote even greater time and attention to the people of Bikaner, his shooting and his numerous other interests.

Nine

OLYMPICS TRAP SHOOTER (I)



IN THE TRADITION OF HIS GRANDFATHER AND FATHER, KARNI SINGH was an excellent shot. He was regarded as one of the best of his generation in India, though he himself, of course, always admitted that his father had been even better. Unlike both Maharaja Ganga Singh and Maharaja Sadul Singh, however, in later life Karni Singh preferred to stick to clay pigeon shooting rather than big game shikar. That is not to say that he gave up hunting altogether, however, for he enjoyed shooting duck, grouse and other birds, and could hit ducks high in the sky with the greatest of ease, as his children remember only too well.

"It is strange for all this to happen," he stated in a recording made in the 1980s, "because I happen to be a keen shooter, and in my younger days have done a tremendous amount of bird and animal shooting... I shot tigers — four of them, so far, and about a dozen or more panthers, but gave it up only because I could not stand the idea of live bait tied-up for them All night I could not sleep, thinking of the poor animal being tied up! As a result, I gave up shooting tigers and panthers"

As a child, Karni Singh had watched many top shooters come to Bikaner as guests of his famous grandfather, Maharaja Ganga Singh. This was especially so during the winter months referred as the "Cold Season" when the Maharaja's house-parties at Gajner, especially over Christmas,

was an important part of the princely and British Indian social calendar, and an invitation to join it lent the invitee social cachet. Witness to the ace marksmanship of his father, grandfather, uncle and many others, the young Bhanwar saheb could hardly wait to grow up and own his own gun.

Once allowed the use of air-guns, he took to practicing assiduously, soon gaining considerable proficiency, often at the cost of the insect population of Bikaner and Mt. Abu. With the arrival of his pistol type air-gun, Karni Singh also started experimenting with home-made sights. As he recorded, almost fifty years later, "... one day I went on top of the Shiv Bilas courtyard, after having manufactured [a] cardboard back-sight, until I got the elevation so correct that with this little pistol I could shoot fairly accurately at 75 yards. I had then mastered the technique of elevation "

With mastery nearly came trouble on one memorable occasion. "One day I had got my sight on for long-range shooting," he reminisced, "and aimed my gun at one of these beautiful lamp posts that Lallgarh Palace is dotted with, and the very first shot hit the lamp post and the entire glass [shade] collapsed I ran so fast, so as to not be caught, having done this terrible act. My grandfather, Maharaja Ganga Singh was alive then. Fortunately, no one ever found out, but that was the last time I tried out a gun at such beautiful things that deserve to be protected "

Karni Singh also took to shooting coins tossed up in the air. The task of tossing up the coins sometimes fell to the lot of Asu Ram. (In future years, Asu Ram served an older Karni Singh as his valet for nearly 40 years). Asu used to diligently toss up coins by the hour for the Bhanwar saheb, while Karni Singh, even more assiduously attempted to shoot down every single one of them!

Nearly sixty years later, his paternal aunt, the Maharani (now Rajmata of Kota) still has vivid memories of her young nephew tossing up coins in the air and shooting them down almost effortlessly. "Even at that age," she recalls, "Karni used to handle the gun so smoothly you felt it was a part of him. The movements were always so very fluid "

When Karni Singh was thirteen his father presented him with a specially made 32 bore double-barrel shotgun made by Holland and Holland "It was a rare calibre gun," he recalled, "and larger than a 410 and smaller than a 28 bore. With this weapon I learnt my initial clay pigeon and field shooting." The gun was beautifully balanced, and the

young prince used this for quite some time.

Gun safety and rules were firmly drummed into the young prince's head from the very beginning. For this, perhaps an incident involving Maharaja Ganga Singh's elder son was partly responsible. Recounts Rajyashree Kumari, "When Maharaja Sadul Singhji was a young boy, some Viceroy or equally important personage had been invited for the annual Gajner shoot. They were all in cars and hunting wild boar A young and inexperienced aide got overly excited and failed to observe the safety rules. He fired without due care and his bullet grazed the arm of grandfather, who I gather, was just a teenager at the time. Thakur Gop Singhji of Malasar was livid with rage and was all ready to tear the young man limb from limb but was stopped in time by others and a serious incident was averted. Ever since then, strict respect for fire arms was taught rigidly down the generations."

Later, when Bhanwar Karni Singh was about fifteen, he was given a pair of Holland and Holland side-by-side 28 bore guns by his grandfather. He shot with these till he was almost twenty years old, and thereafter took to using a 20 bore. Karni Singh would be nearly forty before he changed over from the latter to the automatic 12 bores and the 'over-unders', and began to use a 12 bore with recoil-reducers or compensators. It was also when he was fifteen that he shot his first pair of jackals at Gajner in 1939, with such clean shooting that Maharaja Ganga Singh, a witness, was extremely pleased.

The following year, Karni Singh was able to bag some large game at Udaipur, when he went there to ceremonially escort his newly married sister back to Bikaner for her first bridal visit to her parental home — the traditional *muklava* ceremony. He recalled that, "I went to Udaipur in 1940 to bring my sister back, and the late Maharana Saheb, Bhupal Singhji, showed me great respect, which was more than what I expected as a boy of sixteen! I called on the Maharana Saheb and thereafter I was allowed to shoot two panthers and a few wild boar, and then I went to see the famous Chittorgarh fort and then brought my sister back to Bikaner, because that was the *muklava* ceremony."

The careful training Karni Singh had received as a young boy at the hands of his father, Maharaj-Kumar Sadul Singh, at Mt. Abu and Bikaner during the late 1930s had included singles and doubles overhead clay pigeon shooting and ordinary trap. At one stage his father had made him practice on moving targets. This Karni Singh had found particularly

difficult. Ironically, this was perhaps the closest thing to the Olympic Traps at which the grown-up Karni Singh would be so proficient in later years!

"In much later years," recalled Karni Singh in an audio-cassette recording, "I remember I had gone to Kota for a tiger shoot, and the Maharaja Saheb of Kota [His Highness Maharao Bhim Singh], my uncle, was a very famous clay pigeon-shooter, and at that time, I couldn't hit a hay-stack with a clay pigeon gun. He [His Highness of Kota] had set up a trap-range at a place called Darra and there I boasted that I could shoot a moving clay pigeon with a 220 Swift rifle. I was then asked to perform and missed the first and got the clay pigeon clear in the second shot. This was the first and last time I tried it."

Karni Singh had also done a lot of shooting of birds on the wing with his 220 Swift, which had a velocity of 4,110 feet per second, as well as with his 28 bore. "Mostly shotguns were used for birds in flight," he noted, "but in my family my father and grandfather, and also my uncle, Maharaj Bijey Singhji, did a lot of bird shooting with rifles" His flamboyant uncle Bijey Singh also indulged in shooting crows with a .410 gun. "As children of 5 and 6 years old," noted Karni Singh later, "we would go to Bijey Bhawan every day and join him with his crow-shooting We used to collect the empty cartridges and pretty soon had a complete tub-full of .410 Super X Ely cartridges. People used to say that crows forgot their flight pattern when they flew near Bijey Bhawan!"

Maharaja Sadul Singh, in particular, was very fond of shooting quail, and during the months of September and October sometimes arranged for expert traditional trappers to come to Vallabh Gardens and Gajner with their caged trapped birds. At night these trappers used to put the cages at strategic places where there was high grass, and on moonlit nights migrating quail would hear the noise of the caged birds and come and settle down. A regular drive would be organised the next morning at which the wild quail provided excellent shooting

Karni Singh joined his father during these bird shoots at Vallabh Gardens and Gajner on numerous occasions. Once Karni Singh went to Vallabh Gardens accompanied by Kanwar Jaswant Singh of Malasar, and shot 128 birds on one day, and 251 on another. The latter was to remain his record.

Besides Gajner and Vallabh Gardens, two other favourite shikar spots for both Maharaja Ganga Singh and his successor were Hanumangarh

and Suratgarh. From his childhood days onwards Karni Singh had vivid memories of his grandfather and father going to Hanumangarh and Suratgarh to shoot blackbuck. "I myself hated shooting the deer species," he recalled, "but on many occasions when I had grown up a little, I accompanied grandfather and father to Hanumangarh and Suratgarh and stayed at the lovely Bikaner Houses at these two places. They were electrified, with perfect plumbing and painted walls and everything. This was the style in which Maharaja Ganga Singhji lived."

"In Suratgarh, we used to have tremendous fun chasing the Lesser Bustard (locally known as the *tilour*) in open Chevrolets of the 1937 vintage. Jagmal Singh was regarded as the 'dare-devil' driver and whoever was lucky enough to get Jagmal Singh to drive was certain to get the car within shooting range. On one occasion, two very famous *sardars* of Udaipur, Rao Dileep Singh of Batera and his younger brother, Col. Vijay Singh, whom we had first met while he was commanding the Udaipur army units in the Middle East war front in 1941, were also invited by grandfather to shoot. They were exceptionally fine shots, as they were persons. We enjoyed that visit to Hanumangarh and Suratgarh, shooting duck at small ponds, Demoiselle crane in the Suratgarh middle tank, and the *tilour* and Imperial sand grouse on the flats. It was a period of time to which one can only look back with nostalgic memories."

After the demise of Maharaja Ganga Singh, Karni Singh sometimes flew down to Suratgarh and Hanumangarh in his own aeroplane to join Maharaja Sadul Singh for shikar. On one memorable occasion the prince, once again using his own Beechcraft Bonanza aeroplane, flew to Hanumangarh to join his father for a shoot. He landed in the *thal*, extremely pleased with his prowess as a pilot, and little realising that he had picked a bad moment to alight. Unfortunately, Maharaja Sadul Singh had been stalking a very big blackbuck and was, quite justifiably, upset and extremely angry! His apologetic son promptly tendered his apologies and flew back to Bikaner straightaway.

By the early 1950s, Karni Singh, still in his twenties, had come to be regarded as one of the better shotgun marksmen of India. He had, by then, considerable experience in real or live shooting, having bagged many Imperial sand grouse, ducks, partridges, quails, and other birds, as well as large and small animals over time. His trophies also included over a dozen panthers and four or five tigers, but the idea of using live-bait to attract the carnivores also caused him immense guilt and even-

tually he was to give up 'big game hunting' totally However, he remained a keen shooter and enjoyed duck and grouse shoots.

With his awesome reputation as a good shot, Karni Singh entered his name for the clay pigeon event in the first All India National Shooting Championships at New Delhi with the belief that the competition was 'in-the-bag', so to speak. The year was 1952 and the Maharaja was shooting, at that point, with a 28 bore.

To his surprise and dismay, however, and quite contrary to his expectations, the Maharaja found that he could get only 5 out of 25 shots right in the Championships. "Having done a lot of bird shooting, I thought that clay pigeon shooting, which was one of the items on the programme, would be a 'push over' but the opposite was the truth," he discovered to his bemusement.

".. The acid test came when I had to stand 16 yards behind the trap machine and shoot moving targets." There was a green box in which two machines were mounted and the competitors stood in a semi-circle behind these machines, shooting the targets as they were thrown up. They were permitted one shot per target, and followed the then prevalent British rules, whereby the gun was not mounted on the shoulder when the target was called for. Karni Singh found this kind of target-shooting troublesome. "The veteran Baba Harbans Singh Bedi, who shot 14 or 15 out of 25, was the National Champion followed in later years by Devi Singh and others," he noted. "My own score at trap was about 5 or 6 out of 25 at that meet."

More than thirty years later he commented about the 1952 experience in his book — *From Rome to Moscow: The Memoirs of an Olympic Trap Shooter*. "For the first time I met the really big names amongst the pioneers of the target shooting world. Amongst them were Dr Harihar Banerji, who was a household name in the Indian shooting world So was his brother Photik. The great S.N. Chatterji and Mrs. Shobita Chatterji, a husband and wife team, were both there. I suddenly realised that target shooting was a serious sport and my hunting .22 was not the weapon of choice! Apart from the giants from Bengal came the 'Bombay Boys' headed by Jimmy Wankaner (MKS Chandra Bhanusingh) who was the maestro with the big bore rifle. For Traps, Baba Harbans Singh Bedi, Tika Jag Jit Singh Bedi, Tika Surendra Singh Bedi, Sardar Lajendra Singh Bedi and Tika Palendra Singh Bedi, all from one family were a formidable bunch of Trap shooters. And of course, there were P.M. Reddy

from Bangalore, Yuvraj Jaswant Singh of Bilkha from Gujarat, his wife Bubbles, Bharat Singh of Limbdi, Bhupat Singh of Gangad to mention just a few... The fact that precision shooting was not hunting was a lesson soon learnt by me."

"The next year I came to the second national championship a wiser man! By the late fifties the team of the 'Bombay Boys' was to swell into an even more formidable bunch of marksmen. New names like C.K. Vissanji, Mrs. Hina Vissanji, 'Chichibu', 'Prince of Goa', Udeyan Chinubhai, Kishore Khatau and many more, struck terror into the hearts of newcomers like us. Jimmy, their leader, was an all-rounder — he shot just about anything — small bore rifles, big bore rifles, pistols, revolvers and the works, and was perhaps the most knowledgeable of all shooters India had ever had," (Karni Singh 1982.80).

Between 1952 and 1959, Karni Singh took part in many national level competitions. However, though he won the National Championships a couple of times at Bangalore and Delhi with the Big Bore Rifle and once in Rapid Fire Pistols also, he could not make a serious mark in the shotgun category. By this time, he was convinced that he was the worst clay pigeon shooter in India, and had begun to think seriously about giving up the sport of clay pigeon shooting entirely!

However, as he admitted, "Being a shotgun man essentially, my interest in this branch of shooting never really waned." Fortuitously for him, (and in retrospect, for the future of Indian participation in international shooting events), in 1959 Karni Singh visited USA, in the course of his round-the-world trip Here he also met up with a friend, Dr. J.P. Kazickas from New York.

The Maharaja had first met Kazickas in Kashmir in 1958, when both were photographing the Pir Panjal mountain range out of the same window. The two became friendly and Kazickas had invited Karni Singh to Alaska to shoot moose and elk; an invitation that he was never able to avail of, much to his life-long regret. During Karni Singh's visit to New York, Kazickas took his Indian guests to the Camp Fire Shooting Club outside New York city, and introduced the Maharaja to the famous Warren Page of the *Field & Stream* magazine.

Page, a renowned marksman, invited the Maharaja to try out his own trap gun, which happened to be a Model 50 Winchester Trap gun As Karni Singh was to record in his shooting memoirs, "... I found that this automatic trap gun with its single sighting plane was infinitely more easy

to shoot clay pigeons with," (Karni Singh 1982:2-3).

Using Page's gun, Karni Singh was able to shoot a 12 out of 25 in American Traps, about 20 out of 25 in 'Bob Whites' and around 15 out of 25 in skeet. *That started his interest in the sport of clay pigeon* shooting in real earnest! Subsequently, at the suggestion of Page, Karni Singh purchased a Model 50 Winchester Trap gun too, from Abercrombiie & Fitch.

On his return to India, the new gun was given a full work out and the Maharaja found that, as expected, his scores had improved with the specialised trap gun. A trap range was laid out at Bikaner in its rudimentary form in early 1960, and two of the ICI Plus machines, using ordinary clay pigeons, made in Delhi were mounted here Practicing on these machines helped Karni Singh to gradually improve his scores, until he started averaging 21 hits out of 25.

Meanwhile, as early as 1954, Karni Singh had established the Bikaner Thunder Bolts Rifle Club He had also organised the Bikaner (Rajasthan) Shooting Championships at Bikaner on a regular basis The 7th Bikaner Championships, held just prior to the 6th National Shooting Championships, saw International Shooting Union (ISU) skeet introduced for the first time in a competition in India. This championship drew shooters from all over India.

Shortly afterwards, at the 6th National Shooting Championships held at Delhi in February 1960, Karni Singh shot 43/50, which was an all-India record. A few days later, on the very same Nicholson ranges at Delhi, the Bikaner Maharaja fired 93 out of 100 in the National Games clay pigeon event This too was a new all-India record on 100 targets Recalled Karni Singh, "I was happy with this score, being my highest ever, and again a new national record at that time, and I was selected to represent India at the Rome Olympics."

Becoming a member of the Indian contingent that was to participate in the 1960 Olympics at Rome was like a dream come true. "Never in my wildest imagination did I hope that from being one of the worst Clay Pigeon shooters in the country only a few years ago," stated Karni Singh, "that I would have the unique honour to represent India in the world's greatest sports arenas — the Olympic games itself Sportsmen consider themselves fortunate to wear the colours of their schools and colleges, and only a handful manage to represent their States. God was kind to me that I was able to make my debut with the Olympic games"

The Rome Olympics were the first time that an Indian trap team was going abroad. "Keshav Sen of Kharva, whose score was 81, was also recommended," wrote the Maharaja, "but the Finance Ministry would not accept the names of Sardar Daya Singhji as Manager and Maj Cheema for pistols for various reasons. I remember having met the then Finance Minister Shri Morarji Desai, who told me that India was short of foreign exchange and he suggested that if the foreign exchange belonging to me was made available to the shooting team, it would be cleared to participate, to which suggestion I readily agreed, feeling that our team with more shooters would get a better opportunity to represent India . It may be noted that those days Indian citizens who had foreign exchange of a period prior to 1947, in what was known as "Pre-Zero" accounts, were entitled to use it. I am gratified to see now that the use of my foreign exchange among other things did help to establish this sport in India," (ibid:3-4).

At this point in time, Indian shooters had never seen an Olympic trap range. In fact, it was only on the morning following his arrival at Rome that Karni Singh saw an Olympic trap range for the first time when he reached the Tiro a Volo Lazzio shooting grounds! Cartridges in adequate numbers and of the appropriate quality were yet another problem. These drawbacks notwithstanding, the team trained as best they could, given the existing facilities in India. "We were at best novices to this sport, and both Keshav Sen and I who made up the Trap team for India were more on a learning mission than anything else," the Maharaja candidly acknowledged.

Rome was to prove an unforgettable experience. It was an August evening when Karni Singh, accompanied by Maharani Sushila Kumari, flew into Rome on a BOAC Comet. They were met at Rome airport by Sardar Daya Singh, the Indian shooting manager. The opening ceremony of the 17th Olympic Games was held on August 25, 1960. "It was a bright, warm and sunny day," recalled the Maharaja, "and we walked almost four miles to reach the Olympic Stadium. It was a memorable day for the 4-member team of Indian shooters to walk behind our flag as members of the Indian Olympic contingent. Our uniform consisted of orange turbans and dark-blue blazers, which bore the insignia of the Indian Olympic Association with India proudly emblazoned on the top .. The stadium was packed to capacity and among the flags of numerous nations, proudly hoisted all around the stand, flew the Indian tri-colour and to me it never

looked more beautiful," (ibid:10).

For ten days the shooting team practiced from morning to evening in the gruelling summer heat of Rome. The Maharaja shot well. "Coca Cola is my 'strongest' drink", he wrote in his memoirs, ".. and the Maharaja of Patiala who was then President of the Indian Olympic Association promised me a case of Coke if I could get a 25 straight." [i e. 25 hits in as many shots]. "Two days later he had to keep his promise, this being the sixth time that I had ever got a 25 straight, and that too in Rome," (ibid).

At the end of the practices came the 'elimination rounds'. By this stage, as Karni Singh had discovered, the scores of the giants had begun to drop, with many of the more formidable competitors often scoring less than India. In his opinion, his partner Keshav Sen too would have pulled off a good final position had he not fractured his arm shortly before coming to Rome and got a bleeding shoulder during practices.

Only thirty-six shooters would be selected for the finals This, admitted Karni Singh, was "... rather a strain, since India had to qualify — atleast one of us had to qualify to shoot in the main competition On the first day of the elimination rounds, on the first round I shot only 20, losing 5 targets in the beginning — and the end of my Roman holiday loomed large. Perhaps I was too tense; I pulled myself together and got a 24 in the next round. There were hopes of making the final now. The next day I did better... My first ambition — to get India into the finals — had been achieved," (ibid:11).

At the end of the first day's shooting in the final championship round, Karni Singh was thrilled to realise that his shooting had placed India high on the leader board with the 10th position "After this," he commented, "I resolved and settled myself to do better The next day I got a 91 [out of 100] and an aggregate of 183 out of 200 which placed India 8th, tieing with France. This was really far higher than we could have hoped for."

"... And suddenly, as the show had started, it ended. The prize-giving was over and Ion Dumitrescu of Rumania walked off with the Gold Medal with a score of 192/200, followed by Rossini of Italy with a score of 191/200 for Silver, and close on whose heels came the Russian, Kalinin, the fastest gunner on the Lazzio Shooting ranges at Rome, who took the Bronze. Jimmy Clark of USA was 4th. The strain was over and India had only 9 points less than the Gold Medalist finishing 8th in the World, out

of 60 contestants on its maiden try," (ibid:12).

Rome was just the beginning. Karni Singh returned to India determined to raise the sport of clay pigeon trap shooting to new heights He was also committed to securing improved ranges and other facilities for all shooters. In this laudable aim he got support from an unexpected quarter — the then Union Finance Minister, Morarji Desai. Karni Singh generously refers to Morarji Desai as the "father of clay pigeon shooting in India" in his memoirs. As he recalls in *From Rome to Moscow: The Memoirs of an Olympic Trap Shooter*, "I had gone to meet him after Rome and requested him for some help with cartridges. I requested him that I wanted to try and win a medal for India. He looked me straight in the eye and said 'I have confidence in you and I know you can do it'. With his blessings and with his encouraging words to help me, I never looked back. The Bikaner Olympic Trap Range and the earlier import of guns and cartridges in India, in many cases duty free, were due to this great man's foresight in recognising clay pigeon as a second hockey for India," (ibid:13).

The Rome Olympics had sparked off great interest in clay pigeon shooting in India. Now several eyes were concentrated on the 1961 7th National Shooting Championships. Karni Singh was 1st in both the traps and skeet events, with his Rome team-mate Keshav Sen coming in 2nd. To add to his immense joy, his elder daughter, Rajyashree Kumari, then just seven years old, made her debut in air-rifle shooting during this championship, and won the 'below 12 years' category of air-rifle event. The prizes were given away by India's Home Minister, Govind Vallabh Pant, and Karni Singh's tiny daughter drew a thunderous applause as she walked up to receive her prize.

The Bikaner Maharaja had, by this time, adopted what was to become a lifelong habit. That of taking note of his faults or problem shots His wife recalls how he always carried a card in his pocket. On this Karni Singh would enter cryptic little notings, which he would study later, often at night after a hard day at the ranges, in an attempt to mentally work out and correct the flaws.

He had also begun work on improving the Bikaner ranges with imported machines. It was at these partially modernised ranges at Bikaner that the 8th Bikaner Trap Shooting competition was organised in January 1961. Although Karni Singh shot the highest score — 48/50 in this competition, he was not in the running for any prize. This was

because, as per the conventions of the Thunder Bolts Rifle Club of Bikaner, local members who were national champions or international level competitors did not compete for prizes. Consequently, Thakur Devi Singh, Baba Harbans Singh Bedi and Maharao Bhim Singh of Kota took 1st, 2nd and 3rd places, respectively.

Karni Singh's paternal aunt, the Maharani (now Rajmata) of Kota, recalls that around 1960-61 her nephew insisted she try her hand at clay pigeon traps. Maharani Shiv Kumari had learned shooting from her father, Maharaja Ganga Singh. Her preferred firearm was a rifle and, like most of her princely contemporaries, she had taken part in a certain amount of *shikar*. However, inspite of the fact that her husband Maharao Bhim Singh, the Maharaja of Kota, was himself an ace marksman, who shot both skeet and traps, the Kota Maharani had never considered taking up clay pigeon traps very seriously before.

At the persistence of Karni Singh, Maharani Shiv Kumari practiced assiduously at the Bikaner ranges and at the National Rifle Association of India's ranges at New Delhi, before going on to participate in competitive shooting.

Following the 1961 Nationals, preparations began for sending an Indian team to the Oslo World Shooting Championships, to be held the same year. The Maharaja had been to Oslo once before, in June 1949, during his trip to Europe as Maharaj-Kumar. He thus had some notion of the climatic conditions that could be expected, even though he had never shot in Norway before. "Since Norway was heavily wooded," he recorded, "we could expect dull light occasionally, shooting against foliage and dense forests. We were informed that yellow domed clay targets, the same shape and size as the Italian ones used at the Rome Olympics would be used in Oslo, although at Rome we used all black targets My friend Mr. Aasnes of the Norwegian Olympic contingent to Rome in 1960 had sent me out a few clay targets as samples and they were on display at the National Rifle Association of India's office," (ibid·17).

To avoid the intense summer heat of Bikaner, a range was laid out for practice sessions at Mt. Abu. Here Karni Singh practiced shooting down yellow domed targets against a mountain background. The National Rifle Association (NRAI) had hoped to have a 4-member team represent the country. Eventually, however, only Karni Singh was able to qualify. With India's 'one-man team' went Karni Singh's secretary of

The Lovenskjoldbanen ranges, named after their donor, were set in beautiful surroundings amidst thick forests and hills, and Karni Singh found that the yellow-domed clay targets showed up well against the dark green foliage, subject, as he put it, "... to the sun shining If it was cloudly, the birds were really hard to see and that is what made shooting in Norway so tricky." Karni Singh achieved good scores in the practices, averaging 95, 96, 97 and once even 99 hits (out of 100 shots fired). This, he frankly admitted, "...was a very high score for me or for any one for that matter. I had only shot 99s three times ever till then."

The actual clay pigeon trap championship was shot on two ranges. The No. 1 range was situated on higher ground, and Karni Singh soon realised that he would have to adapt his shooting style to deal with some of the very low targets that were thrown on this range. The lesson learnt the hard way, that of holding the gun point three inches below the top of the trap house in such a circumstance, was soon to be shared with other Indian shooters on his return.

The final of the three-day clay pigeon (International Traps) World Championship was to commence from June 11. Just prior to that, the Maharaja was first introduced to the Master Shooters Badge shooting, where he went on to win gold badges for all the four events that were organised — namely, clay pigeon, skeet, running deer and running deer doubles. This was the only case at Oslo of any one single shooter from any country qualifying for a gold badge in all the four events on the programme.

During this Master Shooters Badge championship, each shooter was allowed only two attempts at each badge, with the highest score counting As Karni Singh elucidated, "... at World Championships, unlike at the Olympics, shooters get an opportunity to classify themselves under 3 categories, i.e, Gold, Silver and Bronze for master shooter's badges. These badges are a very coveted trophy. A shooter tries his best to get as many gold badges as possible. Normally, shooters fall into three categories, namely shot guns, rifles and pistols, rarely combining the three. Since competitors coming to the World Championships are of necessity of a very high standard, a number of them would naturally qualify for the gold badges in the items for which they have been sent... However, the chances of his [a traps and skeet shooter] qualifying for the running Deer badge, particularly for a gold would be somewhat remote. The opposite would apply to a Running Deer shooter who would

long-standing, Thakur Anand Singh. Even though Anand Singh was travelling at the Maharaja's expense, he was asked to stand-in as 'manager' too, since he was a member of the NRAI.

Now, as would be the case on other future occasions, Karni Singh felt the responsibility of 'holding the fort' on his own to be an unenviable position. "I usually shoot better against heavy odds," he admitted, "but nevertheless it would have been a more reassuring feeling if another team member was there to take over in case a gun jammed or I was plain unlucky and shot badly or was just not feeling well."

It was the end of May 1961 when Karni Singh left for Norway to participate in the Oslo World Shooting Championships, accompanied by his Maharani and his 'team manager' cum-secretary, Anand Singh. Enroute, he had a brief stop-over at Rome, where he was immediately invited to shoot at the Lazzio shooting ranges which he had become familiar with just a year earlier during the Rome Olympics. In his memoirs Karni Singh noted, "I was genuinely touched by the warmth of the greeting the Italian shooters gave me at this small festival shooting they had going on at the time. It was just as well I shot 1 day at Rome to get used to the extremely fast targets — way faster than our improvised range at Mt. Abu," (ibid:20).

Karni Singh reached Oslo on the night of June 2, and practices started from the very next morning. "There was only myself on the range the first day", he recalled, "but from the next day on Mr. Lira of Chile joined me and from then on we shot regularly for a bet for a bottle of Coca Cola — two shooters from the opposite parts of the globe enjoying a friendly contest!" Soon the ranges were full of shooters. If the Rome games had served as an introduction to world class shooting in clay pigeon for India, Oslo was like a college reunion, according to India's sole shooter. For Karni Singh, the "... most wonderful thing was to see the genuine delight on the faces of shooters from all parts of the world when they met at Oslo."

The British team, like the American one, included a pair of young shooters aged 17 and 21 respectively The 21 year old British shooter was Jackie Stewart, who was to become a legend in the world of car racing in later years! Recorded Karni Singh, "He and I had tied in the finals at Oslo with the highest score among the Commonwealth Countries It just proved my point that the future for India would also lie in training boys and girls from schools and colleges, if we seriously wanted to ... make a name in the sport of world shooting," (ibid).

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... find a clay pigeon or skeet gold, silver or bronze badges difficult to win... In case he [the shooter] betters his score in the World Championships that would not qualify him to get the higher badge in the Badge Championships, unless the first 100 targets of the main competitions are counted for badges," (ibid 21-22).

With a gold badge in clay pigeon under his belt with his first try on June 9, Karni Singh was mentally ready for the clay pigeon (International Traps) world championships. On the first day, June 11, it was raining lightly Karni Singh got a 96 by the end of the day The next day the weather was better, but though Karni Singh shot better than the previous day, he had a bad start, losing the first two birds. He then went on through the next ninety-eight birds with only one more loss, and finished the day with a 97. Now remained only the final day's shooting!

On the third day Oslo had "... really foul weather — it rained all day and it was like a Christmas day in Delhi when it is raining and the wind is cold. It was quite an experience shooting with raincoats and fumbling with frozen fingers unable to load the gun. It was really funny, but by God's grace I got another 97 with a total of 290/300 — six points only out of 300 behind the Gold Medal Score and thus tieing for the 13th place in the world with six others.... Little did I then realise that the following year at Cairo we would come within a hair's breadth of winning the World Championship Gold Medal" (ibid:23).

With justifiable pride, he observed that, "... in the final score analysis, an Indian competitor was able to get a score higher than any Norwegian or other Scandinavian shooter on their own range under climate and light conditions quite foreign to us. This was no small satisfaction for me." For finishing among the top shooters, at the prize-giving ceremony Karni Singh was awarded a momento prize in the form of a glass flowerbowl on which OSLO 61 was etched. The awards were given away by Kurt Hasler, the popular President of the International Shooting Union.

It was now time to bid farewell to shooting friends and return to India. Oslo had provided the opportunity of meeting up with old friends from the Rome experience and with making new ones. They included the top names in international shooting; among them Ennio Mattarelli, Francis Eisenlauer, Ion Dumitrescu, Liano Rossini, Sergei Kalinin, William (Bill) Abbot, James Clark, Nikandrov Yurii, Joachim Marscheider, Hossam El-Badrawi, Moafi, Aso Tento, Imani, Deckert, Crow, Powell, Foster, and many many others.

Besides meeting up with old friends from Rome — Karni Singh also made new ones, among them, Col. Angell and Major Michael Tipa, "... officials of the American team who went out of their way to be helpful to India," and Dr. McLaughlin of USA with whom he "... became friends at first sight because we both tipped the scales at over 200 lbs." His lifelong friendship with Glynne Jones of Britain was also formed while at Oslo. Bill Abbot was a consistent source of inspiration for the Maharaja too. Recalled Karni Singh, "Whenever my spirits were low or I was plain tired, Bill encouraged me to keep on entering the various Badge Championships, convincing me I could make the Gold Medal although I had my doubts."

"I can go on endlessly mentioning names of the great sportsmen I met at Oslo," Karni Singh stated in his memoirs, "because the fraternity of shooters is really a bunch of great guys no matter which part of the world they come from. There is no politics here and everyone's love is his gun," (ibid:26).

An instance in point was the running deer doubles badge championship. "I shall never forget the first day," he said, "[when] I appeared with my new Remington Running Deer Rifle which I purchased locally and which was sighted out by my Norwegian friends because I was busy with clay pigeon. Since Remington cartridges were not available easily I was supplied with Sako ammunition which gave me endless trouble, but within a split second I had complete international aid at my disposal. The world famous gun mechanic from the Soviet Union took over charge and fixed my weapon in no time. I was immediately assisted by shooters from Norway, Sweden and America. I shall for ever remain grateful for this act of kindness as I did not have a clue as to how to fix the Remington pump action because I had never seen one, much less fix before The rifle performed perfectly thereafter. On another occasion my American friend Mr. Deckert on the US team found my new trigger no good so he gave me his own perfectly checked out trigger which made all the difference to my scores at Running Deer in Oslo," (ibid 30).

Karni Singh also returned from Norway with a lesson It " had been driven home hard, that in case India wanted to become a big name in International clay pigeon shooting we would have to start picking up youngsters with many long years of shooting ahead of them and train them intensively with comparable quality of guns and cartridges We would need many new ranges all over the country so that we could forge ahead as one

of the top clay pigeon nations of the world.... Shooters from other countries as usual were trained and equipped at considerable national or gun or cartridge manufacturers expense. The shooting sport is undoubtedly expensive and well beyond the means of an average citizen. I prayed that when the question came of sending a team to Djakarta for the Asian Games next year or to the Cairo World Championships in 1962, our country would consider training up our shooters well in advance at state expense I was now hopeful that in this sport India would be able to gain a great deal of International prestige in the years to come," (ibid:31).

On his return to India, Karni Singh discovered that his feat of winning a master shooters gold badge in all the four items of the competition had sparked off considerable interest in the shooting sport, and not long afterwards, a felicitation function was held in the upper rooms of Parliament House. "The function was organised by the National Rifle Association of India and Sardar Dhupia and Baba Harbans Singh Bedi of Delhi were the moving spirits behind the show," he recalled. "Our great Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru himself presented me a Silver Salver on behalf of the organising Committee and our late Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, who succeeded Mr. Nehru, was also present in his capacity as the President of the National Rifle Association of India."

Not long afterwards, on March 14, 1962, an investiture ceremony was held in Delhi at Rashtrapati Bhawan to present the newly constituted Arjuna Award for excellence in sports and games to outstanding Indian sportspersons. In his capacity as an ace marksman, Karni Singh was one of the recipients of the Arjuna Award. He received this honour, in the form of a statuette and a citation, at the hands of the then President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

The Cairo World Shooting Championships, scheduled for October 1962, were now the event Karni Singh was looking forwards to. In the intervening period, the 8th National Shooting Championships were held earlier the same year at New Delhi. It was inaugurated by the Union Railway Minister, Jagjivan Ram. Karni Singh shot extremely well in the championships, taking 1st place in both the clay pigeon Olympics Traps and the Skeet events. His score for traps was 198/200, and for skeet 88/100.

This championship was made memorable for Karni Singh for various reasons. For one thing, his sixteen year-old son, Narendra Singh, competing for the first time in Junior Traps (Indian Rules), won the gold medal

in the event, besides gaining the 3rd place in the 15-20 age group air-rifle Deer shooting. At the same time, his eight and a half year old daughter, Rajyashree Kumari, took 1st place in both Junior Traps air-rifle and the air-rifle Deer shooting competition in the 'below 12' age group. A further highpoint came when Karni Singh's uncle, the Maharao Bhim Singh of Kota took 3rd place in skeet, while the latter's son, Karni Singh's cousin, Maharaj-Kumar Brijraj Singh of Kota took 3rd place in clay pigeon Olympic Traps.

In August 1962, selections for the World Shooting Competitions scheduled for Cairo were organised at New Delhi. Scoring 199/200 and establishing a new national record, Karni Singh once again secured the 1st position at these trials and qualified for a place in the traps team for Cairo "From being the worst in India to attain a 199/200 in Clay Pigeon in 3 years span was an exhilarating experience," commented the Maharaja. "I never knew I was capable of such deep concentration until I shot a 198 and a 199 in a bare few months span, both being recognised by the National Rifles Association as National Records at their respective times," (ibid.35).

Preparations for Cairo now intensified From his Egyptian friends Karni Singh had learned that the Cairo ranges were flat and rather like the Delhi and Bikaner ranges Black targets were to be used here. These reportedly made for a difficult target when thrown against a tree background, and he therefore practiced keeping this factor in mind. Meanwhile, relations between India and China had continued to deteriorate throughout the year. This Sino-Indian border tension cast a long shadow that marred competition enthusiasm for the shooter who was also a Member of Parliament (as it did for the rest of the team) over going to Cairo.

On the night of October 4, 1962, the Cairo-bound Indian shooting team assembled at the airport at Bombay The team was captained by Karni Singh, and included Udeyan Chinubhai, C K Vissanji, Geeta Roy, Kalu Singh, Haricharan Shaw and Apji Kalyan Singh. There was, however, no team manager accompanying the party.

The Indian team reached Cairo at 4 in the morning, and a few hours later Karni Singh was at the Dokki trap ranges, ready to start practicing. He found Cairo, to which he was no stranger, unusually warm for October. Though the days were sunny and bright, with wind picking up during the day, the mornings were unpleasantly humid. "Shooting whether in the

middle of the day or early in the morning resulted in pools of perspiration," he recalled. In ensuing years he "... came to the conclusion that one should expect the worst climatic conditions to coincide with a major sports event!"

At the opening ceremony held on October 11, Karni Singh proudly carried the Indian flag in the march-past. The Maharaja's heart was full of foreboding, though, since only the previous day, on October 10, there had been a clash between Indian and Chinese troops at Tseng-Jong, and war seemed imminent. Nevertheless, the team was determined to perform well.

" .. By the time the march-past finished, it was close to one o'clock and standing in that excessive heat was certainly no picnic, but it was a unique experience and honour for us to have represented India at the 38th World Shooting Championships, more so as this proved to be a year of our best performance abroad in clay pigeon or shooting in general ... Mrs. Geeta Roy and Mr. Haricharan Shaw had to do their elimination shooting on the same afternoon for the .22 event which was unfortunate, and the fatigue of the march-past must have told on their scores, but they did well and qualified in spite of it," he recalled (ibid.41).

The badge championships for clay pigeon began the following morning Karni Singh and his team partner, Apji Kalyan Singh, had drawn two separate squads Both qualified for their Master Shooters gold badges and spent the four days between the Badges and the start of the World Championships in equipment care and regulated practice.

On the evening of the 15th, lots were drawn for squads and clay pigeon stations. Both of India's clay pigeon shooters had again drawn different squads. It had been decided that the competition would be held over 4 days instead of the usual 3, to allow for the over 100 competitors in traps alone. In this manner, the first two day's shooting was to consist of two strings of 75 targets each, the third day would be 50 targets and the fourth day would be kept for a full course of 100 targets. This would also leave time for tie-shoots which were expected in such competitions

On the morning of October 16, the clay pigeon competition got underway. Karni Singh finished the first day's shooting with 74/75. On the second day he again dropped only one point, finishing with another 74/75. He had also obtained a one-point lead over everybody else. His team-mate Apji Kalyan Singh, unfortunately, was plagued with health problems and was not able to score as highly as in the Badges, though.

At the end of the third day's shooting, Karni Singh finished with 49/50, with an overall score of 197/200 and still maintaining his lead in the field.

By now, Karni Singh found that the cumulative effect of strain was building up, especially as he was in the lead. He later stated, "Had I been in the first ten or fifteen shooters, there would have been less strain, but after the realisation dawned on me that India could possibly win the world championship, the strain of keeping fit and praying hard that the guns and cartridges would function normally, was in itself telling," (Karni Singh 1982:48). Someone else who was praying hard for the Maharaja's success, as was by now her established practice, was his wife, who had accompanied him to Cairo and was a critical onlooker at the ranges each day.

On the fourth and final day of the competition, determined to win, Karni Singh took his place at his station. As he remembered the day, "... about the fourth or fifth shot, my gun jammed. I pulled the trigger and the first shot fired normally, but for the second shot the trigger did not cock. When I handed the gun over to the judge, he put it to his shoulder and pulled the trigger, but the shot did not discharge as far as I could see. He took it off his shoulder, according to me looked at it again and fired it again with a bigger jerk and the gun went off. I was thus given a lost target and the Gold Medal went out of the window! This rule, however, requires clarification. According to all principles of Trap shooting a shooter is not expected to pull his trigger several times to get it to shoot the second shot. My squad mate also saw the judge pull the trigger more than once as he mentioned to me later Since the motto of the Indian Shooting Team is to resort to the highest standards of sportsmanship, I decided that I would accept the loss and do nothing about it, but my squad mates from other countries and both the side judges confirmed that the judge had indeed appeared to have pulled the trigger twice, and asked me that in the interest of my country [that] I represented, I should appeal. Accordingly, I put in a verbal appeal which was turned down, and so I put in a written appeal which was likewise turned down.... Abiding by the highest standard of sportsmanship, which I repeat is the motto of all Indian sportsmen "that the judge is always right", I ... resigned myself to having lost a target at one of the most critical phases of this World Championship, and for that matter in retrospect in my entire shooting career," (ibid:48-49).

Determined to put the loss behind him, Karni Singh doggedly carried

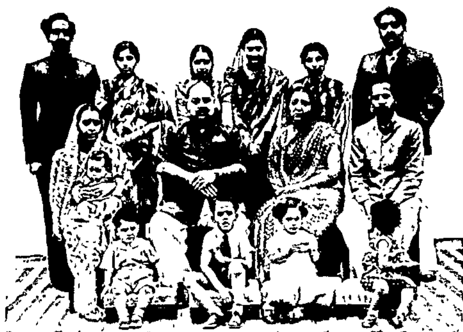
on, and ended tied for first place with Zimenko of USSR with a score of 295/300 apiece. "The shooters collected round me and gave a most thunderous applause and a most warm handshake," he remembered. "Experienced shooters of Egypt and other countries immediately surrounded me and took me to a room where I was asked to relax because the tie-shoot was to begin almost immediately."

After a quick couple of sips his favourite drink — Coca-Cola — Karni Singh proceeded for the toss which decided the stations Zimenko and he would respectively occupy for the ensuing 'barrage' or tie-shoot that was to decide the gold medalist. He described this in his memoirs in the following words: "One of the toughest and most gruelling tie shoots in Clay Pigeon Shooting history began when two of us continued to shoot against each other to break the tie in series of 25 targets.... We ended up with .. an aggregate of 74/75 each and still tied. It was then decided by the judges that it was too late and that we were to come the next day to shoot out the 'Barrage' as they called the tie shoot. The time was fixed for 9 30 a.m and both shooters were on the lines in time the next morning "

"In between this marathon tie shoot I got mixed up in a presentation ceremony of a tiger skin on behalf of India to UAR Shooting Association [at the Nile Hilton Hotel] ... I attended the function as team Captain as I could not possibly refuse. A team manager would have come in handy here.... By the time we dispersed it was 10.30 p.m. and the best place for a shooter in a tie shoot was to be in bed. By this time my whole body was stiff and aching with fatigue and while I felt fit in other respects, the exhaustion had built up."

"Next morning it was bright and sunny with hardly any wind and Zimenko and I started our gruelling tie shoot off for the second day to break the tie ... then I ran through a piece of bad luck, when I lost one target and halfway through I lost 2 more... Zimenko lost one target and he was one down whereas I was 3 down in the last string of our tie shoot, so Zimenko got the Gold and myself the Silver medal. I must say with pleasure that Zimenko was one of the best shots I had seen.... Strangely enough, Zimenko and I had also tied for the 13th place in Oslo in 1961," (ibid:49-51).

It was a proud moment for the world vice-champion, as the International Shooting Union referred to Karni Singh, as he received the silver medal at the ceremony conducted at the Pyramid Ranges. "I just stood



A family portrait. Seated left to right:
Maharaj-Kumrani Sushil Kanwar, (in lap) Prince Narendra Singh,
Maharaja Sadul Singhji, Maharani Sudarshan Kumari and
Maharaj-Kumar Bhagwat Singh of Udaipur.
Standing left to right: Maharaj-Kumar Amar Singh,
Princess Dev Kanwar, Maharaj-Kumrani Sushila Kumari,
Maharaj-Kumrani Manhar Kumari,
Princess Lakshmi Kumari and Maharaj-Kumar Karni Singh.
sitting bottom: Prince Arvind Singh, P. Mahendra Singh,
Princess Yogeshwari Kumari, and Princess Ragini



'THE THREE MUSKETEERS' AS KARNI SINGH FONDLY CALLED HIS CHILDREN.
LEFT TO RIGHT: PRINCE NARENDRA SINGH, PRINCESS
MADHULIKA KUMARI AND PRINCESS RAJYASHREE KUMARI





Princess Rajyashree Kumari being introduced to Late Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru by her father (1960).

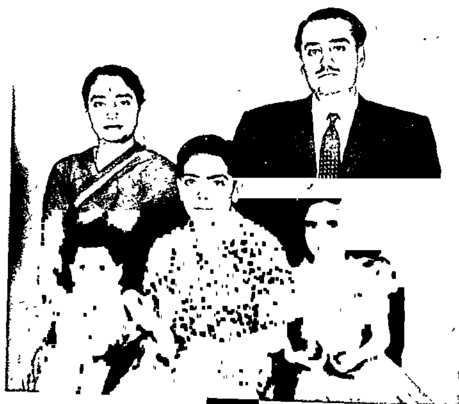
(top) The 'naam karan' or 'name giving' ceremony of Princess Madhulika Kumari, younger daughter of Maharaja Karni Singh.



Dr. Karni Singh with Princess Rajyashree in Gajner.
He often pointed out that
the gun and Rajyashree were of the same size.



Prince Narendra Singh.
An unusual shot of him by his father.



FAMILY PORTRAIT.



Dr. Karni Singh with his son Prince Narendra Singh after the later won a prize for clay pigeon shooting.



Princess Rajyashree at 8 years age seen taking her rifle prize from Indian Home Minister Mr. G. B Pant. One of Dr. Karni Singh's favourite pictures about 1961.



In Gajner 1974 when Princess Rajyashree Kumari was expecting her first baby. Everyone referred to this photo as the chip and the block.



Princess Madhulika Kumari of Bikaner and Yuvraj Rajvir Singhji of Maliya photographed after their wedding at Lallgarh Palace Bikaner.



Maharaj Kumar Narendra Singhji of Bikaner with his wife Princess Padma Kumari of Chamba after their wedding and on arrival at Fort Bikaner.



MAHARANI SUSHILA KUMARI SEEN WEARING HER HUSBAND'S SILVER CLAY PIGEON MEDAL AT THE 7TH ASIAN GAMES.



AT THEIR FARM IN SRI GANGA NAGAR
(PRINCESS RAJYASHREE WITH DR KARNI SINGH).



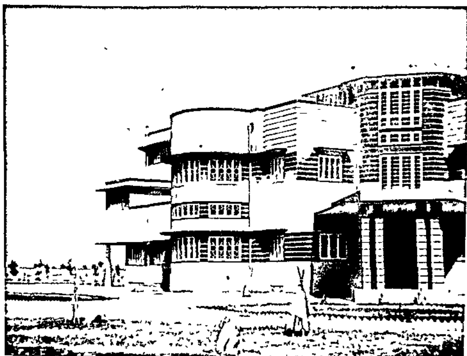
WITH HIS FATHER-IN-LAW MAHARAWAL LAKSHMAN SINGHJI
OF DUNGARPUR.



IN THE YEAR 1967, DURING THE MEETING OF THE PRINCESS TO RESOLVE THE PRIVY PURSES ISSUE, WITH SMT. INDIRA GANDHI.



OUTSIDE THE SUPREME COURT IN DELHI AFTER THE PRINCES WON THE PRIVY PURSE CASE.



KARNI BHAWAN- THE HOUSE WHICH DR. KARNI SINGH BUILT
AND WANTED TO LIVE IN BUT COULD NEVER DO SO.
HE BOUGHT THE LAND ON HIS OWN EXPENSES





DR. KARNI SINGH WITH HIS GRANDCHILDREN.

there spellbound, thanking God for his kindness," he said about the moment when he witnessed the raising of the Indian flag for the first time in international shooting. Disappointed "... after having led the field for 2 days not to have won the World Championship for my country," Karni Singh felt that "... as a sportsman one must learn to take defeat and victory with the same amount of humility and with a smile, which is the motto of all good sportsmen which we had learned from our childhood."

When the competitions were over, the team could look with satisfaction at its total tally of achievements. In all, two bronze badges had been won by Geeta Roy and Kalu Singh, two silver badges by Haricharan Shaw, and two gold badges by Karni Singh and Apji Kalyan Singh, in addition to the Maharaja's world championship silver medal. They also carried back with them fond memories of friends — old and new — and of their Egyptian hosts.

Their triumphant home-coming was rendered sombre, since the conclusion of the Cairo World Shooting Championships had synchronized with the invasion of India by the Chinese on October 20, 1962. Recalled Karni Singh, "Though we had won the first ever shooting world medal for India, all jubilations were forgotten because of the hostilities on our northern borders. Thousands of brave men had given their lives to defend our country. Our thoughts, even though the competitions were on, were focussed on this hard grim reality," (ibid 57).

Fortunately, the conflict did not last very long Even so, Karni Singh noted that the "... entire period from the time of our return from Cairo and right upto the National Championships, was a period of much gloom due to the war, and no great activity took place in the target shooting sport generally" Due to the Chinese invasion and the resulting 'Emergency' that was declared, the 9th National Shooting Championships were organised at New Delhi later than usual. Held from April 6-11, 1963, the competition was shot on a half-course due to this. These nationals once again saw Karni Singh walk away with the gold in clay pigeon traps with 199/100. In addition to this, he also won the Individual 22 Rapid Fire Pistol event (half course) with a score of 284/300.

For Karni Singh, the 9th Nationals were also important because it was at this event that Randhir Singh, who went on to become one of India's top shooters, made his debut as a boy of 16, winning the Juniors Clay Pigeon Traps through shooting a straight.

In September of the same year, the governing body of the NRAI met

and selected a team of three, namely Karni Singh, Apji Kalyan Singh and young Randhir Singh, for the clay pigeon traps competition in the Tokyo pre-Olympics, scheduled for October 1963. Maharao Bhim Singh of Kota was chosen team manager. On October 2, a bare ten days later, the group boarded an Air India flight bound for Tokyo, Karni Singh had managed only 12 days practice before departure, as Parliament had been in session in Delhi until September 21, and it was only after the House adjourned, that he could concentrate on practice.

"At this stage," he recorded, "I had imported three Browning trap guns with 32" full choke barrels one of which I made available to Randhir Singh. He used this very gun at Tokyo. My pair of Brownings had been sent to Ed Sowers in USA who fitted the new 'Hydrocoil' stocks, and these were back in time for me to use in Tokyo. Since I was using the conventional over/under trap gun for the first time, I had taken the precaution to have this new recoil reducing device fitted to my gun. There was very little chance to use these guns before we left for Japan, which was to prove a costly mistake. The lesson we were soon to learn was never, never, never, to experiment just before or during a major Championship.

The team arrived to a droll experience, followed by a cordial welcome from their Japanese friends at Tokyo Airport. There was some consternation when the team's baggage was checked and the customs official gravely informed them, via an interpreter, that 'it was a terrible thing to bring weapons into Japan'! "This was indeed most amusing because the sole purpose for which the Indian shooting team had gone to Tokyo," commented Karni Singh, "was to participate in the *Clay Pigeon Shooting* Championships in Japan. However, we soon had the officials from the Japanese Clay Pigeon Shooting Association intervene and sort out the problem. We had no further difficulty in getting our guns and cartridges into Japan."

By the time the team finally reached the Hilton hotel in Tokyo it was already midnight, and the manager got a shock when he saw the guns and large stock for cartridges they were carrying. "Since we were the first of the shooting teams to arrive, he could not imagine what we were going to do with so much gun-powder around! He asked us if the cartridges could be kept in the cell underground, to which we readily agreed and I am sure the Manager slept more peacefully after that," noted Karni Singh (ibid:62).

The clay pigeon ranges were situated at Morayama, approximately 27 kilometers from mid-town Tokyo, and the Maharaja made his way to the ranges the very next morning, unwilling to give up even a single minute of practice time. He learnt the hard way that a trip from the hotel to the ranges and back, with a practice session of 50 shots, meant leaving at 11 am and returning at 7 pm, without any lunch! The Indians soon shifted to a small hotel closer to the ranges. The Morayama ranges were in the process of being scrapped for major championships, since better ranges were under preparation for the 1964 Olympic Games at Tokorozawa.

The Badge Championships on 100 targets were held on October 10, and the final championships of the clay pigeon event on 200 targets on the 12th and 13th. While Karni Singh won his gold badge yet again with a 97/100, his new Browning over/under trap guns, with their specially fitted Hydrocoil recoil reducers, were causing him some problems. Unfortunately, he had not managed to put in long hours of practice on these guns before leaving India, and when the guns malfunctioned at Tokyo during practice and the Badge Championships it created justifiable anxiety.

On the second and final day, Karni Singh's apprehensions came true. His gun malfunctioned. He then sought permission and changed over to his second gun. However, even though both the Brownings were a pair, the balance, fit and feel of the second gun was marginally different, as is often the case, and Karni Singh decided to switch back to the first gun again. In the process, he went down 5 points in 7 shots alone. From having started the day tied in the lead position, he ended placed 18th in a competition in which Zimenko finished 1st, followed by Shiowaza of Japan, with Gehmann of West Germany in 3rd place Karni Singh had to be content with receiving a medallion as consolation prize for having finished among the top 20.

Karni Singh's elder daughter competed for the first time in clay pigeon, using a little .410 shotgun, at the 10th National Shooting Championship held at Calcutta the following February, "She was so small that I had to support the barrel of her gun with one hand... Who knew then that this was the starting of a new career for an Indian girl shooter," noted the proud father. The little princess was given a consolation prize for being the youngest competitor in clay pigeon. She went on to win the Gen. Vikram Singh Trophy and the St. Stephen's College Trophy in the 'under 12' and '12-15 year' age groups.

It was not only to his favourite child that Karni Singh offered constant guidance and encouragement. He was genuinely driven by a desire to draw out the best talent in the country and to offer them better facilities so that they could represent India at international events and win kudos for the country. It was this, as much as his own personality, that made him so generous with his time and advice to all sportspersons he came into contact with throughout his entire life.

At this stage Karni Singh was not merely a competitor, but was also the Vice-President of the NRAI. In addition, Calcutta also became a venue of innumerable functions for him for yet another reason — that of being the Maharaja of Bikaner.

Immediately upon landing at Calcutta airport, Karni Singh discovered a huge crowd collected near the aeroplane. "... I did not realise that they had come to meet my wife and myself," he recounted. "As it turned out, it was a reception party of people hailing from Bikaner because more than two lakhs (Two hundred thousands) of citizens hailing from the erstwhile Bikaner state live in Calcutta in the pursuit of business. My wife and I got a very warm welcome, which touched our hearts very much, as this was really our first visit to this great city. From then on the competition and public functions ran concurrently, making shooting extremely difficult for me. There were so many invitations to dinners and parties and functions... I did not know how I was able to shoot at all, but the warm-hearted welcome of the people, hailing from my own part of India, was something quite overwhelming," (ibid:78).

That August, trials were held at Delhi for the Tokyo Olympics Karni Singh, who had in the interim gone to Bombay in connection with the approval of his Ph.D thesis by the University, returned in the second week of August to put in four days of practice for the trials on the Delhi ranges This was followed up at Bikaner, where he put in a further week's shooting on Olympic trench. He practised using white dome targets at Bikaner, akin to those to be used at the Tokyo games.

The trials for the Tokyo Olympics were not straight-forward for the Maharaja To cite him once again, "I had a bad run when I shot a 94 and somehow my shooting had gone off. I returned home, read my shooting notes, lightened my Model 50 trigger and came back with added determination and shot a '100 straight' on the second 100 targets to finish with a bare one point lead". Devi Singh was the second member selected for India's clay pigeon traps team for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics Sardar

Daya Singh Sandhu was named manager and Randhir Singh the reserve marksman, while Kalu Singh accompanied the team as a coach-cum-mechanic.

Karni Singh then returned to Bikaner, missing Parliament for nearly a month while Devi Singh and he trained at the Bikaner ranges. They also fitted in two days of practice at the Delhi ranges afterwards, enroute to Japan.

"Fortunately, for the first time the Government gave us free cartridges for training," recalled Karni Singh, "and I came to Bikaner for some intensive training on our Olympic lay-out. During one of my long unbroken strings I shot a '206 straight' which was and still is the longest straight run I have ever shot in Olympic Traps, and yet our scores in Tokyo were poor. Unfortunately, I could never find my Bikaner form again in Tokyo after we suddenly encountered extremely fast machines there, which were speeded upto 75 metres for the first time after a change in ISU rules of which we were ignorant" (ibid:81).

It was well past midnight, local time, when the Indian team arrived in Tokyo in October 1964, and later still by the time they had checked into their hotel. They had barely fallen asleep, when an earthquake jerked everyone wide awake again. The next day the Indian clay pigeon shooters made their way to the ranges for practice, since they wanted to take full advantage of every single day's practice time. However, Karni Singh found that the combination of jet-lag, time difference and fatigue, to which had been compounded the one and a half hour's travel time to the Tokorozawa ranges, meant that his reflexes were much slower In the days leading up to the Olympics opening ceremony, Karni Singh and his team mates continued to practice regularly at the well appointed, modern Tokorozawa ranges. Here they were joined, over the days, by more and more shooters from different parts of the world.

At the opening ceremony on October 10, Emperor Hirohito of Japan took the salute. The trap events commenced from the 15th. By the end of the second day's shooting, Karni Singh lay in 12th place with a score of 141/150. The third day dawned clear and sunny Only 50 targets remained to be shot. However, Karni Singh found he had become too tense and over-cautious and managed to score only 45/50. Thus, in the final tally he finished with a 186/200, tied for the 23rd place, and was placed in the 26th position.

In the light of his unsatisfactory personal performance at Tokyo,

Karni Singh pondered long and hard about the future of the shooting sport in India, following the team's return from the Olympics. Would Indian shooters continue to under-utilize their true potential in the international circuit because of the lack of the latest equipment and other infrastructure in the country? Shooting was expensive, and at the same time, foreign exchange restrictions prevented new models of trap machines and other lay-outs from being imported into India, even by the NRAI. In addition, quality manufacturing of international level clay targets continued to be a problem, as did the availability of proper inexpensive cartridges in large numbers These issues bothered him and he often spoke about them in Parliament.

Meanwhile, following the National Shooting Championships in of 1965 and 1966, the NRAI felt that a large contingent of shooters from rifle, pistol and shotgun disciplines should be sent to Wiesbaden for the 39th World Shooting Championships, so that Indian participants could gain international experience. However, midway through the selections, the All India Council of Sports, taking the lead from the Government, decided to send only one shooter — Karni Singh. This was strongly opposed by him personally on the floor of Parliament. He even put a Short Notice Question to the Lok Sabha. Eventually, a four member team captained by Karni Singh (traps), along with P.K. Das (skeet), Shobita Chatterji and Santa Biswas (both for small bore rifle events) was cleared for Wiesbaden.

The team flew into Frankfurt early in July 1966. Once they were safely ensconced at the Hotel Nassauer Hof, some 15 minutes by car from the ranges in Wiesbaden city, Karni Singh was able to meet up with many of his shooting friends from the far corners of the globe. He found that "... the climate at Wiesbaden, on a sunny day, was like that at the end of November in Delhi, but when it rained the temperatures would suddenly drop, making it equal to the coldest January in Delhi and it rained fairly frequently The Germans claimed that this was the wettest summer in many years."

The Wiesbaden ranges were located in picturesque surrounding. However, only fours days of practice were provided to the shooters and that too on a 'rationed' basis of 150 shots training per competitor each day. More disconcerting was the fact that Phono Pulls were being used for the championships. "As far as the Indian team was concerned," noted Karni Singh later, "we had never seen these PHONO PULLS before, although

we had read in magazines about experiments on this new method for instantaneous target release, whereby the shooter's voice would release the target and not the man in the puller station.... The introduction of the Phono Pulls was a new experience to us. They were actuated by the voice of a shooter and, to the horror of many of us, it was found that the mechanism would not always release the target to a shooter's voice!" (ibid 110).

Karni Singh's own event, clay pigeon traps were held over 5 days, as against the more usual stipulated 3 days. Once again, he obtained his Master Shooters gold badge in clay pigeon traps with no difficulty. The first day of the finals was clear and dry, and Karni Singh finished the day with a score of an impressive 49/50. They shot through rain over the next three days. In his book, Karni Singh noted that "... it was freezing cold and raining all the time. The wind was high and we were all frozen stiff. Even the British complained of the cold; so, what of the Indians! ... On the fifth and last day it rained again but not too heavily, but the fog was very heavy, and sometimes so thick that the white target got lost in it for the second shot," (ibid:116).

The event was won by USA's Ken Jones who set a new world record with 297/300, and Karni Singh had to be satisfied with 16th place (tied for 13th place) with his 287/300. Much more than winning or losing though, Wiesbaden again underlined for the Maharaja the camaraderie of his shooter friends, who time and again helped and encouraged him and each other. The innumerable shooting friends he made throughout his career were given due acknowledgement later in his book based on his shooting memoirs.

There were two major international events in the offing for 1967 One was the 1st Asian Shooting Championships scheduled for Tokyo, and the other was the World Shooting Championships for trap and skeet at Bologna (Italy) a few weeks after that. Karni Singh found that both of these shooting events sparked off considerable local interest in India, since this was the first time that trap and skeet were being shot as an Asian event. Up until this time even the Asian Games had not found it necessary to include clay pigeon shooting within its purview

In May 1967, when once again the summer heat was at its peak, selection trials for Tokyo's 1st Asian Shooting and Bologna's World Shooting Championships were organised simultaneously at Delhi. At these Karni Singh set two new national records in both trap and skeet

with scores of 299/300 and 196/200 respectively. Another shooter who set a new National record and qualified for a berth to Tokyo in the Air Rifles events selections (held at Ahmedabad) was the Maharaja's 14 year old elder daughter, Rajyashree Kumari.

For the first time, India would be internationally represented by a father and daughter team, both of whom had qualified in open all-India selections by setting new national records in their individuals fields Karni Singh was a very happy man indeed!

Ten

OLYMPICS TRAP SHOOTER (II)



THE 1ST ASIAN SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIPS WERE HELD AT TOKYO towards the end of July 1967. "The green signal for the team to leave and its final composition came, as usual, a bare five days before the departure date which had been delayed to the 15th of July," recounted Karni Singh. "As it was, I had not shot clay pigeon after the May selection trials due to extreme heat and dust storms in the Bikaner and had started serious training a bare 7 days before departure for Japan. The Delhi range, in spite of all assurances, could not be got ready in time by the NRAI. To add to our miseries, Rajyashree's Hammerlie [illegible] junior model air rifle developed trouble and an S.O.S. to the manufacturers resulted in another, though heavier model, being flown out to Japan in time to be cleared with our luggage on arrival," (Karni Singh [illegible]).

The Indians arrived at Japan's Haneda airport to a cordial welcome, in weather that felt as hot and humid as the Delhi they had left behind. This time Karni Singh had to divide his attention between two ranges — the clay pigeon ranges at Tokorozawa and the Asaka rifle ranges where the air rifle and rifles shooting had been arranged. Both ranges were separated by a good half-hour's drive. Following four days of practice time, the main competitions began with Karni Singh once again qualifying for the Master Shooters gold badge with practised ease, in [illegible]

a bout of fever.

"... I was better on the day of the match though groggy with antibiotics which the kind American doctor, Col. Vivian gave me at the Tachikawa US Air Force base," he recalled. "After recording a 101° temperature he asked me in his typical Air Force manner to forgot about the temperature and concentrate on the shooting and leave it to the pill!"

Fever or not, Karni Singh found himself in good form in the competition, scoring a 96/100 and a 97/100 off the first and second day's shooting He continued to shoot well till the time the very last string was to be shot on the third and final day. "That was when fatigue and, I think, the effect of the drugs caught up," he ruefully recorded. "I lost 7 targets in the last 25 alone. I think it was a clear case of human failure." Karni Singh finished placed 7th (having tied for 5th place), behind Iguchi and five other Japanese shooters. The Championship was over for him.

However, just when he was feeling self-confessedly low and miserable after losing an opportunity of winning a medal for India, came news which changed his mood. His daughter Rajyashree had shot a 342/400 in air rifles on the other shooting range. This, noted her proud father, was ". . a score which staggered all the adult shooters on the range and her father no less! This was a shot in the arm and I felt the trip was finally worth it. An only child entry in the whole championships and a girl at that in a men's match..." (ibid:130). While the Air Rifles event was won by Korea's Namsang Wan and Rajyashree was not among the medal winners, her performance had been remarkable.

The young Bikaner princess was not only the only 14 year-old in the competition, she had shot against and bettered the scores of eleven of the established male marksmen from different parts of Asia in her first contest abroad. From now on, the MP Maharaja who had made his name in international clay pigeon shooting was to often hear the refrain of 'Oh, so you are Rajyashree's father?'

Meanwhile, the countdown for the forthcoming 1968 Olympic Games at Mexico had begun. In India, too, athletes and sportspersons from different disciplines were preparing for selection trials. The 13th National Shooting Championships and the National Games were held at Madras between January 13-17, 1968. In the clay pigeon event, Karni Singh once again led the field with a tally of 184/200. Randhir Singh and Devi Singh took 2nd and 3rd places respectively. Madras proved a lucky hunting ground for Princess Rajyashree Kumari too. She put in

a remarkable performance to end with 5 gold medals in various events

Concurrently with the Madras Nationals in 1968, preliminary selection trials were also held for the Mexico Olympics. This was followed by the second selection trials at Delhi. Once again, Karni Singh reiterated his mastery by taking 1st place in both traps and skeet and qualifying for a place on the Mexico-bound Indian team. Randhir Singh was the second traps shooter to qualify.

"The Mexico Olympics will stand out as one of the most memorable sports event in my memory," wrote Karni Singh later in his shooting memoirs. "... I left India on the 5th of October, 1968 as I was tied up with my famine tours in my capacity as an MP, my Constituency being in the grip of one of the worst famines in the last 50 years. I missed my plane connection to Mexico City on 7th October at New York and had to spend the night there. This resulted in one more day lost for practices but, ultimately, worked out fine as the ranges in Mexico were not ready even when I got there and helped me to partly absorb the 11 hours time change. Randhir Singh met me as soon as I got to Mexico City and told me that he was shooting very good scores and that was some encouragement for me. I was counting a great deal on young Randhir Singh, then only about 22 years old," (ibid·146).

This was Karni Singh's second visit to Mexico, the first being the around-the-world trip of 1959. "Both my wife and I did not find the high altitude be a major problem on either visit," he noted. However, Kalu Singh, who was the shooting team's coach-cum-mechanic did fall prey to altitude sickness a day before the opening day march past, though he soon became acclimatized too.

The inaugural ceremony of the Mexico Olympics was a grand affair "The Mexican people and Government had gone all out to make it as big a show as Tokyo or Rome and indeed it proved to be so. The Indian Contingent march past got a big applause although our Contingent was small The biggest applause was given to the Czechoslovakians for their heroic stand against Soviet intervention made so obvious by a hundred thousand people who virtually became hysteric when the Czechoslovakians marched in. The Indian team had still not entered the arena [illegible] this immense hundred thousand throated roar went up into the [illegible] was a very touching experience for us... The famous Aztec Stadium situated near the Mexico University which is world famous for its [illegible] murals, was the venue of a great Olympic festival The [illegible]

opening ceremony was over, serious practices began and from then on it was a fight for the medals," (ibid:148).

The finals held high drama for Karni Singh. In his own words, "On the fourth and last string of the first day I was going happily for another straight when the man on my immediate left apparently got a few broken targets and consequently were declared 'No Birds'. At this stage, I was so deeply concentrated that I noticed nothing. However, as soon as this man got a good target or so it appeared to me and shot it, I picked up my gun and called 'Pull' and got a sharp left one which I broke. I was startled when the Judge called a 'No Bird' on me. He spoke in French and myself in broken Italian. From what I understood he apparently said that I had fired at a broken target i.e., the first two were damaged birds and mine was the third shot he called no bird on. This was such an utterly fantastic story that it can only be according to me, that the judge got confused with the case of the man on my left who got the 2 or 3 no birds and not myself. I called for only one target and it was a perfect one and I broke it. The second target, a repeat for me, was fired at after the 'No bird' was called and after a heated debate between me and the judge which ensued, and which target I lost in the refire due to the altercation "

"While I normally do not like to protest, I felt it my duty to my country to appeal. Thereafter, another discussion started between the French Judge and the Army Officers, following my appeal, who were sitting as Side Judges, he speaking in French and they speaking in Spanish. He tried to convince the side judges and the officer in the puller house, but I could see that nobody understood anybody. To top it all, the Jury member was perhaps a Russian who understood nobody. Nor could anyone understand him. A very senior office-holder of the International Shooting Union who was standing there, told me that he felt that my stand appeared correct but there was little he could do because by the time the appeal reached the Jury of Appeal the judges decision was declared final. Being a sportsman I will always say that the judge had, in his opinion, given the judgement in all fairness. That was his judgement and though I personally thought otherwise, that was that," (ibid.150-151).

"... When this excitement died down," noted Karni Singh (ibid), "I continued to break the rest of the targets and finished with a 98/100 at the end of the first day. This score gave me a tie for the second place at the end of the first day along with about six other shooters being some

of the best shots of the world."

The second day had its own problems. For one thing, Karni Singh could not find his earlier form of a 25 straight. And for another, the shooter on his left ran into difficulties and lost targets, and the resultant sound of the judges's hooter signalling a lost target became a familiar and thoroughly distracting sound. At the end of the second day, the Bikaner Maharaja, with 194/200, found himself placed 10th, having tied for the 8th position.

At the Nationals that followed at Bhopal in 1969, the victors once again included both of Karni Singh's daughters and his cousin Bhuvaneshwari Kumari, besides Karni Singh himself. The main selection trials for the San Sebastian championships in Spain were held that July. The San Sebastian series was to be confined to traps and skeet only, being "... the smaller of the two world shooting championship series which is often referred to as the World Shooting Championships for moving targets." Four shooters finally qualified to represent India in Spain.

They were two sets of father and daughter teams — Maharao Bhim Singh of Kota (skeet) and his daughter Princess Bhuvaneshwari Kumari (ladies traps), and Maharaja Karni Singh of Bikaner (Olympic traps) and his daughter Princess Rajyashree Kumari (ladies traps). "We were all bubbling with excitement," wrote Karni Singh. "Both the Maharaja of Kota and I had attached considerable importance to the training of the girls as they were going to make their debut in International Clay Pigeon shooting."

The World Shooting Championships, which began in October, proved to be one of the toughest competitions Indian shooters took part in because of the extremely high winds encountered at San Sebastian. Karni Singh describes how "... one day during the practices, the wind was so strong that the targets were actually blown backwards over our heads and fell 30 yards behind us in the parking lot!! I had, at one stage, to keep my hand pressure behind my daughter Rajyashree's back to prevent her being pushed back," (ibid·163).

The trap ranges were situated on the side of a cliff. The surroundings were admittedly picturesque and the arrangements excellent, but it was the high winds which became the *leitmotif* of the championships "On Range 'A', particularly, the winds rode up the sea side of the cliff and hit the targets just about the time the first shot was fired and lifted it several feet in the air as the wind eddies caught them.... The scores were

so funny that at times you wanted to laugh. On Range 'A' many World Champions and famous shooters met their match against the Wind God.... Such low scores one never believed possible in World Championships, and yet my daughter Rajyashree Kumari, the youngest on the ranges, shot practice scores of 22, 21 and 19 out of 25 and surprised me, amongst others, no end. In a special match called the Castillo-de-Chinchon, she got a third position medal in the ladies event which now finds a place of pride in her collection of medals," noted Karni Singh in his book (ibid:161).

Meanwhile, Karni Singh suddenly found himself faced with trigger trouble with his pair of Browning over/under trap guns during practices "It was possible to match the wind," he observed wryly, "but very difficult to fight the wind as well as the triggers."

The two Indian princesses, however, were shooting well, weather notwithstanding. On the first 100 targets of the ladies event 16 year-old Rajyashree Kumari shot 71/100, while Bhuvaneshwari Kumari, eight years senior to her Bikaner relative, shot 70/100. "The older girl then shot the last 50 targets magnificently and led Rajyashree by six points to the finish [to take 4th place in the competition]. Rajyashree shot the last 25 in heavy fog. She was in a later string as fog increased. God knows how in this troubled soupy weather she got another 18 to finish for 8th position in the world", chronicled Karni Singh. "... We were told Rajyashree would get a special consolation prize for being the youngest shooter at the competition, to be given by the Spanish Shooting Federation and they did in fact give her a lovely crystal bowl as a souvenir," (ibid:164-165).

"... Whatever had been my own sad experiences," Karni Singh observed, "the scores of the girls saved the situation and put us on the shooting map of the world again. They were very popular wins to quote a British shooter as they came in their saris to receive the badge shooting medals."

The World Championship in Skeet began on the 24th There was heavy fog on the skeet ranges and it rained, making the already cold conditions far from easy. In addition to this, Karni Singh discovered that the targets were also somewhat faster. Consequently, in Skeet neither Maharaja made it to the top position.

Unfortunately, San Sebastian was to be the last of the World Shooting Championships that Indian shooters would attend for many years to come.

Phoenix (Arizona) was designated as the locale for the World Shooting Championships scheduled for 1970 South Africa was participating in this, and in protest against South Africa's policy of apartheid, the Indian government opted to withdraw its participation. This was the Indian stand on all sporting and other contacts with South Africa. Consequently, India ceased to participate in the World Shooting Championships from 1970 onwards. It would be long years before the situation changed and Karni Singh would not live to see that change take place.

The long term effect of this on Indian shooting was more severe for women shooters, as at that time the Olympics, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games did not have separate ladies events. While this did not stop Indian women shooters from participating in open tournaments with men, it did rob them of opportunities to show their true potential and mettle in international shooting events.

For Karni Singh, a fitting finale to 1969 was provided when Rajyashree Kumari received the prestigious Arjuna Award for her shooting on December 9, at the hands of President V.V. Giri of India. She was then only sixteen and a half. A month later, on January 11, 1970, her achievements were acknowledged by the people of Bikaner with a public citation. Karni Singh was equally proud later that year, when in October 1970 the name of his cousin, Princess Bhuvaneshwari Kumari, was prominent in the next list of Arjuna Award winners.

The very next year, despite his pre-occupation with arrangements for the marriage of his son with Princess Padma Kumari, daughter of the Maharaja of Chamba, Karni Singh once again won the trap event in the 16th National Shooting Championships held in April 1971 Man Singh finished 2nd and Rajyashree Kumari 3rd in the open event. In the clay pigeon traps ladies event (ISU rules), Rajyashree took 1st place and Bhuvaneshwari Kumari 2nd The Bikaner princess also won the Juniors 'below 20' years trap event.

In the skeet section (where Karni Singh did not participate) the top positions went to Maharao Bhim Singh of Kota, Col Milder of USA and Bhuvaneshwari Kumari, in that order. "It was interesting to see an American, and a foreigner, participate in a national event," remarked Karni Singh, "because in later years my daughter Rajyashree, when she married and shifted homes to London..., was debarred from receiving Indian prizes."

In August the final trials for the forthcoming 2nd Asian Shooting

Championship scheduled for Korea saw a four member, Clay Pigeon Traps team, consisting of Bhuvaneshwari Kumari, Rajyashree Kumari, Man Singh and Maharaja Karni Singh, selected.

Just before leaving for Korea, Karni Singh got a bad attack of influenza. "When I left India I could hardly talk," he recorded. "Our first stop was at Hongkong and we were met at the Airport by a number of Indian friends, and right through dinner all I could do was whisper and make sign language! There was no way out, so I put myself on to an antibiotic in Hongkong and by the time we reached Korea the next morning and when the team was received by the Indian Ambassador, I could just about make myself audible at the press conference. I was back to normal after continuing the antibiotics which were by then also prescribed by a Korean Doctor and I had no problems getting the phonopulls to work thereafter!" (ibid 176).

Karni Singh was already well known among his friends and aquaintances as a keen 'barefoot doctor', so that this self-medication was not a matter of surprise for those close to him. In fact, he was a life-long avid, even voracious, reader of medical texts, and enjoyed discussions on medical matters with doctors known to him. He always travelled with his own medical bag, whether it was to an international shooting competition or on a tour of his constituency, and he was more than willing to share his stock and dispense medical advice to any suffering team-mate or other associate!

One of the major problems that Indian shooters found confronting them, immediately upon arrival at Seoul on October 15, 1971, was the extreme cold. "While in shotgun shooting we did have considerable difficulties due to lack of outside shelter and exposure to cold winds," Karni Singh commented about the 2nd Asian Shooting Championships, "the rifle shooters had adequate shelter in their lovely new range, but suffered more because their fingers were frozen, and rifle shooting naturally required more accuracy."

The traps competition matches began on October 21. At the end of two days of shooting in inclement weather Karni Singh had a score of 134/150. This placed him tied in the lead with Korea's Kim Tai Suk at the 150 target stage. Now remained only the final 50 targets to be shot on the following day. The 150 target stage also marked the conclusion of the traps team events. The individual scores of Rajyashree, Bhuvaneshwari, Man Singh and Karni Singh added up to a total of 471/

600 at this point. This score put the Indian trap team in 3rd place in the competition and brought India its well-deserved bronze medal.

At this stage of 150 targets and with the team event over, the Kota princess decided to drop out. "However, Rajyashree continued to shoot," narrates Karni Singh, "and from here on she was the only woman shooter to participate in the full 200 targets course of fire in Traps [finishing in 14th place]. On the last day we only shot 50 targets to complete the course on 200 targets. This was a very tense moment. The weather had improved and the rain had cleared."

With his final tally of 180/200, the gold medal was won by Karni Singh, while Kim Tai Suk and Kang Duk Hoon, both from Korea, finished 2nd and 3rd respectively. The prize-giving which followed was a simple but touching ceremony. According to Karni Singh, "It was a memorable occasion for me to stand on the Victory Stand once again after Cairo in 1962 and to see the Indian Flag unfold this time on the Centre Mast. It brought back to me vivid memories of Cairo in 1962 when I tied for the Gold Medal and finished second in the World following a tie shoot But I was convinced that many more Indians would stand on the victory stand if we continued to enter in team events in Trap and Skeet in future years," (ibid 180).

Despite the public acclaim which greeted the team on its victorious return from Korea, Karni Singh was critical of his individual performance. He felt that "...the Korean shooting was at best an average showing. I had never shot so badly and whether I won the gold medal or not was of lesser importance. Only a couple of years earlier I had been shooting scores of 192 or better, but they had dropped to a mere 180, which was beginning to bother me. I knew of course, that I was capable of shooting a higher score for the simple reason that I had shot a '100 straight' immediately on my arrival in Korea with borrowed Japanese cartridges ... However, a year later at Munich I was once more to shoot a similar score of 180 The common factor was that I was shooting with the new pair of Perazzi guns from Seoul to Kuala Lumpur for four whole years. A few years later I stopped using these lovely guns in competition ... although they were and are superb pieces of equipment. I went back to my Brownings and my scores once more improved. It appears a heavier gun suits me better," (ibid: 182).

The joy of bringing back a gold medal was soon tempered with personal sorrow for Karni Singh and his family. On December 19, as 1971

drew to a close, his mother, Rajmata Sudarshan Kumari of Bikaner, died.

The shooters had returned to home to find the slow simmering tension between India and Pakistan over the Bangladesh/East Pakistan issue had risen to danger-levels. Soon afterwards, whereas on the one hand, the Constitution 26th Amendment Bill to abolish privy purses etc. was moved in the Lok Sabha for consideration on December 2, 1971. On December 3, hostilities broke out between India and Pakistan. Karni Singh, the parliamentarian, promptly volunteered his services for the Air Force. He then proceeded to Bikaner, since his mother wanted him to be with the people of his erstwhile inheritance during this period of war It was while he was there that his mother passed away.

1971 thus became a year of bitter-sweet memories for the Maharaja The year that ended with the demise of his darling mother and the cessation of his princely titles and privileges, had also carried its share of joy and delight; and the marriage of Karni Singh's only son on April 27, and the gold medal and team bronze medal won at Korea were part of it.

A few months later, at the 17th National Shooting Championships held at New Delhi in April 1972, Karni Singh repeated his by now familiar routine of winning the Prime Minister's Trophy for Clay Pigeon shooting Maharao Bhim Singh, Randhir Singh, Rajyashree Kumari, Devi Singh, Kalu Singh and other Bikaner Thunderbolts Club regulars were among the prize-winners in various contests ranging from skeet to traps, Junior 'below 20' and team events.

In the pattern which was well established by now, the Nationals also formed part of the preliminary selections for the 1972 Munich Olympics. Since the overall scores at the 17th nationals had been below par, a second trial was held immediately afterwards. At this Randhir Singh and Karni Singh qualified for the Olympic clay pigeon traps and secured their berth on the Munich bound Indian Olympic contingent The Indian shooting team, accompanied by Kalu Singh as coach-cum-mechanic and Apji Kalyan Singh as an official, arrived in Munich for the 1972 Olympics separately from the rest of the Indian contingent after an overnight halt at Tehran to change planes. On this occasion, Karni Singh took both his daughters too. His wife, Maharani Sushila Kumari, also accompanied her husband as usual.

The Maharani was by now a well-known figure in the shooting world. She had attended all the competitions her husband had taken part in

from the very beginning, and all those close to Karni Singh were well aware that 'Her Highness' always prayed for the success of her husband — 'Bo-Sab' as she called him. On one occasion in India, many years before the Munich Games, Karni Singh was shooting badly during practices. His Maharani was not present. Observing Karni Singh's shooting, his friend and fellow-shooter Kartar Singh Sodhi turned around and quipped, "Someone should send a telegram to Her Highness saying 'Husband missing. Come immediately'." Karni Singh pointed out to his friend that he was very much present on the ranges and not *missing*. At this, Kartar Singh gleefully clarified, "But of course you are. You are missing your targets!"

The camaraderie of the sports world remained very much present at the Olympics, even when medals and national prestige were at stake. Karni Singh, who finished 34th and 36th in individual Traps and Skeet respectively, recorded how Durniev of USSR took him over to the skeet range after the match and showed him how to shoot Station 8 — the Maharaja's weak point at Munich — properly "I hardly miss Stn. 8 targets now," Karni Singh noted in his memoirs.

In spite of all the friendship on the ranges, Karni Singh carried home mixed memories of the Munich Olympics. The perfection of the shooting ranges, the efficient games organization and the warm hospitality of the German people had been marred by the massacre of the Israeli team "The free atmosphere of the Olympic village was to be lost for all times to come after Munich, or so it would seem until sanity returned to the world. It was a terrible tragedy", he commented (ibid 192) Munich also marked the period from which Karni Singh ceased to make 16 mm colour and sound movie films of all the major shooting events he had been attending

Given Karni Singh's parallel career as both a MP and a shooter, he was later not able to put in much practice for the 1974, 7th Asian Games at Tehran for which he was selected, since Parliament was in session To add to it all, as ever, the final team composition was announced late, which put pressure on the nature of pre-competition preparations by the Indians The team faced yet another problem when cartridges ordered for the Asian Games as per the new ISU rules failed to arrive in India in time.

All this notwithstanding, the Tehran competition would always stand out in his mind as a memorable event. "The Iranians went all out to make

the 7th Asian Games a great festival of sports," he noted.

The finals for the trap began on September 2, and continued over the following two days. "Strange as it may sound," he commented, "Mr. Matsuoka — the Japanese shooter — who finally finished 1st and was awarded the Gold Medal and I, were squadded next to each other, Mr. Matsuoka being on my right. Now this is a well known fact in trap shooting that a good squad results in higher scores all round, and the shooter who had a steady shot on his left will benefit from that fact and improve his scores because shooting takes place one by one and the man on the left sets the pace and rhythm for the man on his right. I wish Matsuoka had drawn a lot on my left. Had this been the case I would have benefitted from his good shooting," (ibid: 197-198).

".. The match reached very tense moments when we arrived for the third and final day of shooting. Matsuoka was now squadded in a separate squad from me. I knew that if he had a relatively poor shot on his left it would affect his shooting and it did. ...I was lucky and shot a 25 straight on the morning of the last day on the first string and a 23 in my last string," (ibid: 198).

In the final tally, Matsuoka finished with an impressive 192/100 to take the gold medal in clay pigeon traps, while Karni Singh took the silver medal with 189/200. The bronze medal was shared by Japan's Ishige and Earnshaw from Philippines. Bhuvaneshwari Kumari finished 8th, with Man Singh in 17th place. The Kota princess was " . the toast of the range — the only lady shooter who finished 8th among 33 shooters from all over Asia. If asked dispassionately I would say that her shooting was by far the best performance on the range," commented her proud cousin Karni.

Karni Singh also went on to win the Bronze Medal for Skeet — his first ever medal in Skeet Shooting won outside India. Inspite of having won a bronze medal in Skeet at the Asian Games in Tehran, Karni Singh did not participate in the skeet event in the 20th Nationals held at Chandigarh from February 7 to March 2 1975. He did, however, take part in the Olympic traps, and to no one's surprise won the event and the Prime Minister's Trophy once more, having shot 191/200.

His daughter Rajyashree Kumari finished 2nd, but since this Arjuna Award winner was now living abroad, the prize went to Man Singh and Rajyashree was given a special trophy. Recording how he had driven from Delhi to Chandigarh with his daughter to take part in the competitions,

Karni Singh noted, "Rajyashree ... was no longer permitted to win prizes in Indian National events. However, she decided to compete anyhow."

The 3rd Asian Shooting Championships which were held later that year in August at Kuala Lumpur marked a watershed in his career of clay pigeon shooting. The Emergency was on, the mood was grim, and Karni Singh wanted to opt out because he had not had adequate practices. Despite his fear that he would "...possibly disgrace my country with a low score...", however, Karni Singh took the Silver Medal in Traps and 6th position in Skeet. The lone woman shooter, India's Bhuvaneshwari Kumari, finished 9th in Traps. By the time the competition ended, Karni Singh had decided to voluntarily retire from the sport at the international level. He was then 51 years old, and felt that younger sportspersons had to be encouraged. The only way to ensure this was to make room for them. In his words, "... barring Randhir, sadly none else among the younger male group were getting anywhere in traps," (ibid:223). From now began *Karni Singh's years of voluntary retirement*

This decision was typical of the kind of person Karni Singh was. That others got their chance was as important to him as competing himself Winning medals, inspite of the satisfaction and sense of personal pride and achievement that went with it, needed to be balanced, in his opinion, with encouraging younger people to take up the challenge In a way, the attitude was fitting for the grandson and son of Maharajas who had attempted to place service to others before self.

The 21st National Shooting Championships were organised at Bikaner — Karni Singh and the Bikaner Thunderbolts Rifle Club's own home turf — in early January 1976. He could not personally supervise all the preparatory arrangements, however, because his eldest granddaughter fell ill and needed surgery at Delhi around this time He did manage to return to Bikaner in time for the championships though Once again, in the traps event Karni Singh took the Prime Minister's Trophy scoring 192/200. His cousin, Bhuvaneshwari Kumari of Kota, came 2nd, and Man Singh was 3rd. Immediately after his match was over, Karni Singh rushed back to Delhi to be with his grandchild — the caring grandfather taking over from the dedicated marksman!

As had become customary, the Nationals served as preliminary trials for the next major shooting event of the year — the 1976 Olympics to be held at Montreal. Karni Singh was selected, but opted out. In retrospect, Karni Singh had ample opportunity to regret his decision, as he

watched the efforts of the Indian shooters at Montreal. "This poor showing by Indian shooters at Montreal virtually gave a terrible set-back to Clay Pigeon shooting in India... From being the 'Second Hockey' we had come down with a very hard bang!" he rued. Later he also qualified for 11th Commonwealth Games at Edmonton in 1978, as well as the 8th Asian Games at Bangkok, but again opted out. Meanwhat, the Nationals had not been held between January 1976 and February 1979. When the 22nd Nationals were eventually held at Delhi, early in 1979, Karni Singh resumed his practice of securing 1st place in Traps.

It was also during the course of 22nd National Championship that he was introduced to a young teenager, Mansher Singh, whom he encouraged to take up the sport seriously. The youngster would, over the next few years, have the chance of shooting with Karni Singh at several championships, and was to go on attain further heights in the future. That is precisely the vision for Indian sport that Karni Singh had in mind when he had opted out from participating in international events so that younger sportspersons could test their skills and emerge successful

In April 1980, the third trials for Moscow Olympics were held, and because of his consistently good performance, Karni Singh was called for these trials By now, he felt ready to re-enter the arena of international shooting. As he phrased it, "It appeared now that for the time being my voluntary retirement was coming to an end as I geared up to attend the 3rd trial in Delhi. I could feel my adrenalin begin to flow again," (ibid:228).

Karni Singh qualified for the Moscow Games with a score of 186, (though he was not given official clearance for participation at Moscow by the Government until June 30, 1980). During the months leading up to Moscow, Karni Singh, accompanied by his wife, spent the months of May and June in England, with his elder daughter and son-in-law and their children In anticipation of a berth to Moscow, Karni Singh arranged for five days practice at the Holland & Holland shooting ranges in London, to keep his hand in

On June 30, a bare two weeks before the team was to reach Moscow, Karni Singh received the final governmental clearance for participation in the Olympics. The morning of July 1 found him on a train, bound for North Wales and the 'North Wales Shooting School'. This is the venue of the annual British Clay Pigeon Grand Prix on Olympic rules traps, to which his friend, Glynne Jones had so often invited him. The same after-

noon saw him practicing on the ranges of the School. Karni Singh put in five days of intensive practice in North Wales, starting at 8 am and finishing 9 pm each day.

Training in North Wales also took place under the gimlet eye of Glynne Jones himself, with the whole hearted support of two this friends of sons. "I got in about the equivalent of one year's practice I would get in India in 5 days under the best coaching and on 4 ranges. Such perfect conditions I could never have dreamt of in India," was Karni Singh's opinion. Since the former Maharaja of Bikaner was also an honorary Life Vice-President of the British Clay Pigeon Shooting Association, a certain amount of attention was focussed on him while he was in England. This was also the more so because Britain was boycotting the Moscow Olympics Thus, the British shooters were empathizing fully with the training efforts of an honorary member of their association, who also happened to be a fine shot.

On July 13, 1980, Karni Singh and his wife boarded a British Airways flight at London and reached Moscow. Apart from language problems which he faced immediately upon landing, and the fact that vegetarian meals had to be specially arranged, Karni Singh found that the Moscow games had superb facilities. There was another problem that he faced, however. And that concerned drink!

"From the Minsk [hotel] I went over with Sardar Daya Singhji to the Olympic village for registration and other formalities which were completed by 9.30 p.m. My urgent worry was whether Pepsi Cola or Coca Cola would be available as I am a teetotaller. As it turned out after much explanation we found out that though Pepsi Cola was advertised widely on kiosks all over Moscow, it was not available when we reached Moscow. So we gave 'BAIKAL', a Russian Cola type drink a go, and found it reasonable. On the July 17, Pepsi Cola arrived and we joined the long queue of Russians for what appeared to me then a life saving drink!" (ibid·235).

In the Traps event, which started the day after the Olympics Opening Ceremony, Karni Singh shot a 188/200 to finish tied for 14th place. He recorded that the Indian shooters were "... greatly encouraged by the visit to the ranges of our Ambassador Mr. I K. Gujral and his wife."

"The moment the competitions were over we went down to the armoury and stripped down our guns, oiled them and put them away so that they could be shipped off to India with the team as I was leaving

for London by the next afternoon plane" recalled Karni Singh. "I normally prefer not to remain in the country where a major competition is shot, as I usually like to return home on the first available plane. After holding my concentration so deeply for 3 weeks I just had no more desire to look at a gun for quite sometime" (ibid:241).

Moscow proved a shot in the arm for the sport of Clay Pigeon shooting in India. In view of the 1982 Asian Games which were fixed for New Delhi, the general interest of the Government, the Indian Olympic Association and the NRAI also increased considerably. In March 1981, a clay pigeon coaching camp was arranged for selected shooters, with competent coaches and an unlimited supply of free cartridges — a first for Indian clay pigeon shooting. This was the scenario that Karni Singh had dreamed of and pleaded about for years!

March 1981 was also the month when Karni Singh qualified for Nagoya, but once more decided to give up his place for a younger sportsperson. Instead, that summer, when he visited London to spend time with Rajyashree and her family (as had by now become his practice each summer), Karni Singh became the proud winner of the 1981 Welsh Grand Prix.

"I had missed the British Grand Prix year after year, as I could never be in England till early August when the Grand Prix takes place. This was mainly due to my being... in India for the Monsoon Session of Parliament. This year not having run for the last two parliamentary elections and thus no longer an MP, I had made it a point to plan my visit to meet my daughter and grand children in such a way that I could take part in the Grand Prix," chronicled Karni Singh.

On August 1, 1981 Karni Singh won the North Wales Cup Championship with a score of 97/100. The very next day, another competition was shot, once again on 100 targets. This was the North Western Cup Karni Singh won this too, again with a tally of 97/100. On the aggregate of both the days — 194/200 — he was also declared the winner of the coveted Welsh Grand Prix 200 target Open Championship It was a proud moment for the 57 year-old Indian when he was informed that he was the only shooter to have won all these three Welsh trophies in the same year

The organizers requested Maharani Sushila Kumari to give away the prizes. "We made one happy beaming couple giving and receiving prizes," commented her husband. "God knows how hard she prays for

my good scores and I am glad she could get a feel of the cups alongwith me and to be able to touch the coveted trophies together at such a memorable moment."

Immediately afterwards, Karni Singh also participated in the British Grand Prix, thoroughly enjoying the event. He later described the Welsh and British Grand Prixs experience as a "Second Cairo" for himself.

The 1982 Asian Games at Delhi were next on the agenda. These would be among the last major events in which Karni Singh participated.

At the same time, the veteran shooter had serious misgivings prior to the Games over the fact that too much training was being imparted to the shooters in pre-Games camps. About two months before the Games he wrote about this matter to the National Rifle Association of India, the All India Council of Sports and Asian Games authorities, stressing that if too much coaching was given in preparatory camps, with long gaps thereafter, it would be counter-productive.

Closer to the actual competition, there were other hiccups For instance, in the case of skeet shooting, the team composition was not decided even three days before. Furthermore, some attempt was made to re-open the discussion over the composition of the traps team, with a suggestion for including the shooter Mansher Singh whose standing was 5th as the 4th member of the team. Since the declared team at the time consisted of Randhir Singh, Karni Singh himself, Gurbir Singh and P.K. Roy on the basis of performance at the trials, Karni Singh took a strong view of this matter and even wrote a representation to the President of the All India Council of Sports, V.C. Shukla

"In retrospect," Karni Singh acknowledged "if Mansher Singh had been the fourth member of the team, the Indian team would have won the gold medal." India eventually lost the traps team event to China and had to settle for a silver medal. Thereafter, though exceedingly tired Karni Singh shot skeet too.

These games were particularly memorable for Karni Singh because he was asked to carry the Indian flag at the official march-pasts — a task he always regarded as an honour and a privilege.

Around November 24, 1982, just a few days before the Opening Ceremony of the Asian Games, Karni Singh received a telephone call from a VIP at 11 p.m. at night, asking if he would like to carry the flag in the march-past. Karni Singh was then 58 years old, and had been considering not participating in the march-past since there was only one

day's rest period between the march-past and his shooting competition. However, when this offer was made, he reviewed his plans. As he recalled it later, "... since I had never borne the flag of India in an important event like the Asian Games or the Olympics, and had let Randhir carry it in Moscow, when in fact I was the oldest member in the team, I asked for time to decide it overnight, and then decided that I would do so."

The next evening Karni Singh went to the Games Village and found that a discussion was going on in which Randhir Singh's name was proposed for carrying the flag. Shocked to realise that there seemed to be some lack of coordination between the high-up official who had telephoned him late the previous night and the Indian Chef de Mission at the Games, Karni Singh told him about the telephonic message he had received. Karni Singh also added that since this would be his first opportunity to carry the national flag he would like to do so.

There was some embarassment over the situation, but as Karni Singh's seniority dated from the Rome Olympics of 1960, while Randhir Singh's was from the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, it was eventually the former who was asked to appear for the rehearsal the next day. The rehearsal went off smoothly, even if the day was unusually hot for the time of the year, as did the actual march-past during the opening ceremony of the Asian Games Karni Singh had two roles to perform. The first was to lead the Indian team into the stadium, while bearing the country's flag, and the second was to escort the Indian sportswoman Geeta Zutshi to the dais for the 'oath-taking'. Both went off without a hitch, and the Games went through the stage of various competitions and events.

As the date for the 'Closing Ceremony' approached, Karni Singh phoned up the VIP who had contacted him for acting as the flag-bearer and suggested that Randhir Singh should be given the privilege of carrying the flag on that day. However, the Chef de Mission insisted that the rules stipulated that the person who carried the flag on the opening day had to carry it on the closing day as well. Thus, Karni Singh once again bore the Indian tricolour. The final ceremony too impressive, as all the flag-bearers from the participating Asian countries lined up in front of the Vice-Presidential Stand, where the salute was taken by the President of the India Olympic Association, Raja Bhalendra Singh.

Karni Singh always maintained that the 1982 Asian Games at New Delhi were amongst the best sports spectacles he saw in his entire life, including the five Olympics he went to. Since he not only participated

in the games as a sportsperson but was also a member of the Asian Games Special Organising Committee, he felt an enhanced sense of pride in the successful conclusion of the New Delhi Asian Games. The overwhelming success of the Delhi Games, "... which made every Indian proud," as Karni Singh put it, was a fitting setting for one of the last major international shooting competitions he was to participate in. (Though later he again won the Gold Medal in Traps at the 1984 Welsh Grand Prix, and in the following year took the British Grand Prix Veterans Gold Medal 'Senior Class' in traps.)

Following the conclusion of the New Delhi Asian Games, friends and well-wishers began to repeat their query about when Karni Singh intended to retire. Karni Singh was now almost 60 years of age. During his long shooting career from the 1950s through to the 1980s he had won many trophies, keeping meticulous notes of his shooting and analysing the weaknesses and problem areas, with the thoroughness that was so very much a part of his personal make-up.

Twenty years earlier, when he had returned from the World Championships in Cairo in 1962, after having won his medal, Sardar Joginder Singh, who was then the Secretary of the NRAI and was later to become the Governor for the State of Rajasthan, had asked him a similar question — 'Don't you think its time to retire?'

Having been brought up in an atmosphere of sports and sportsmanship, Karni Singh placed more of a premium on enjoying a sport and playing the game properly, rather than competing only to acquire more trophies and prizes. Not that those were unwelcome, of course!

Thus, as the decade of the 1980s advanced, Karni Singh opted to continue shooting as long as he was able to, irrespective of whether he entered for competitions or not. As he put it, "... it seems a pity that just because one may not be able to win anymore because of old age, one should give up a sport that you have loved all your life! And therefore I decided finally that life was not worth living without clay pigeon shooting. So now I continue to shoot, and who cares whether I win or lose as long as I have a good time."

Eleven

A MAN'S CASTLE IS HIS HOME: THE FAMILY LIFE OF A PUBLIC FIGURE



MARRIED IN FEBRUARY 1944, JUST A COUPLE OF MONTHS SHORT OF HIS 20th birthday, to Princess Sushila Kumari of Dungarpur, Karni Singh had known an extremely happy family life. He remained totally devoted to his wife all his life, and she was his constant companion every time he left home to travel. He was an equally loving, even indulgent father, and later grandfather.

The emotional attachment he had always felt towards his mother, sister and brother also remained a life-long feature, as did his affection for his cousins and childhood friends. While parliamentary work and shooting kept him away from Lallgarh Palace for long periods after 1952, Karni Singh always made it a point to spend as much time as possible with his beloved mother on every visit to Bikaner. It was well understood by all that Karni Singh would have at least one meal every day — lunch or dinner, as time permitted, with his mother during the entire time he remained at Bikaner.

Karni Singh and Sushila Kumari's eldest child, Narendra Singh, born on January 13, 1946, sometime before Karni Singh appeared for his B.A.

Honours final examination, was the only one of Karni Singh's three children born before the integration of the centuries old Rathore state of Bikaner with the new nation of India in August 1947, and within the lifetime of Maharaja Sadul Singh Eight years later, on June 4, 1953, was born their older daughter, Rajyashree Kumari, and three years, with the birth of their second daughter, Madhulika Kumari, on August 9, 1956, the family was complete.

The family was extremely close-knit, and the children grew up in an atmosphere of love and security. The practical man that he was, Karni Singh knew that his children had to learn to be 'ordinary' citizens of a democratic country, rather than clutching onto the era of Rajas and Maharajas which had undisputedly had passed. At the same time, none knew better than him how important it was that they retained their links with Bikaner and its people.

Both Karni Singh and his Maharani were keen that their children attended regular school and took proper certificates With the passing of the old kingdoms had gone the days when governesses and private tutors could be considered sufficient. With this in mind, they ensured that all three of their children went through the formal school system Their son, Narendra Singh, was sent away to study at Ajmer's famous Mayo College, the public school that the boy's great-grandfather, Maharaja Ganga Singh, had attended so many years ago, while both their daughters attended school at Delhi.

There was a major contrast with being a schoolboy in Maharaja Ganga Singh's era and the mid-20th century, though In the last quarter of the 19th century it had been the established practice for the scions of Rajputana's princely families attending Mayo College to be accompanied by a large number of attendants, in keeping with their individual status. These young princes were often housed in special accommodation. Thus, when Maharaja Ganga Singh had been sent up to Mayo College for five years between 1890 to 1895 at the advice of his Regency Council, an entire complex was occupied by him, complete with a full complement of staff and attendants to see to all his needs

His great-grandson, on the other hand, went to boarding school accompanied only by one attendant who lived just outside the Mayo College compound and was charged with the task of checking the well-being of the prince every evening. It also fell to his lot to write a letter each week to the Maharaja, giving his weekly report.

While their elder brother completed his Senior Cambridge from Mayo College, where he also became the Head Boy, and later went on to study at the Sriram College of Commerce at Delhi, Rajyashree and Madhulika went to school at Delhi's well-known Convent of Jesus and Mary. Here they both successfully took their Senior Cambridge examinations, before continuing on to college.

Meanwhile, early in his parliamentary career, Karni Singh had settled into a routine of sorts. Going to Bikaner over the autumn Dussehra break and during their winter vacations was a regular part of the family calendar, as were the equally regular visits to Bombay for part of the summer.

Following the winter session of Parliament, for which his presence was needed at Delhi, Karni Singh and the whole family used to return to Bikaner for Christmas and the remainder of the children's winter school vacations. Until the abolition of princely rights and privileges, the journeys were made in the special Bikaner railway saloon carriage, which would be attached to the regular train, much to the thrill of Madhulika and Rajyashree. Winter at Bikaner also meant at least one full week at Gajner for the family and their cousins, friends, relatives and other invited guests.

Gajner was the family's magic kingdom, which they all loved intensely in their individual way. Karni Singh, in particular, retained a lifelong attachment to Gajner. Here he always maintained one special tradition set by Maharaja Ganga Singh. This was the custom of all the staff joining the Maharaja at lunch and dinner.

It was at these jovial mealtime gatherings that Karni Singh would indulge in the hot *jalebis* that he so liked, but which were ordinarily 'out-of-bounds' for him because of his being over-weight. Usually it was Thakur Kalu Singh who would bring a batch of fresh, sweet, piping hot *jalebis*. Karni Singh would take one willingly and then say, "Don't let me eat another. This is poison, you know," and then promptly pick up another *jalebi*. He also relished Bikaneri dishes and *karhi* during the Gajner sojourn, just as he enjoyed cream crackers with soup, roasted *channa* (gram), 'cheeselet' biscuits and ice cream made with saccharine in place of sugar.

Another feature of Gajner was the shooting. Asu remembers that even in the days that Karni Singh was Maharaj-Kumar, he loved going to Gajner to shoot. For many years it was the Prince's practice to keep two

guns in his car and dash off to Gajner, or some other spot, for a bit of shooting whenever he wented to. At one stage, it was the driver Rairmal who handled the car. Keen as he was on shooting himself, Karni Singh also taught his children how to shoot and Gajner became a favourite spot for the youngsters to try their skill at live shooting.

The Maharaja was, however, very particular about how firearms and ammunition were handled. "He made sure we followed all the traditional rules of observing the close season and never shooting a sitting bird," comments his Arjuna Award winner daughter, Rajyashree Kumari. "He was a marvellous shot without any doubt, the gun set so easily on him. I saw him attempt the most difficult shots at ducks flying so high they were only specks in the sky and get them."

"He fired my interest in the sport of clay pigeon shooting," she admits. She recalls the great ease and fluidity with which her father was able to shoot a coin flung in the air with a 22 rifle. "I have seen him do it in Gajner once and it was quite astonishing, no effort seemed to be required He made it look easy, when in reality, it was definitely not."

If a spell at Gajner was the norm over winter, much of Karni Singh's touring of his constituency would also be done during winter, and most of his office-work in the gardens of Lallgarh, rather than within the confines of a room. Frequently Karni Singh and his Maharani would stay on in Bikaner for his constituency work, while his son returned to his boarding school at Ajmer and his daughters to their school at Delhi at the end of their holidays.

Bikaner held a routine, just as Delhi did If at Delhi it was the Parliament that decided the pattern, at Bikaner it was constituency work A late-night person by preference, at Bikaner he normally woke around 8.15 a.m Invariably, whether at Delhi or Bikaner, he would put on a record of western classical music while he bathed and dressed. It was his habit to keep a slipbook with him, on which points were noted even as he got ready for the day. At around 9, he would go off for an hour's shooting practice. On returning, he would go off straight away to hold office under the shade of a *neem* tree. Around 1.15, he would return indoors and then usually carry on to his mother's apartments to join her for lunch

After a short rest, it would be back to more office-work, once again out-of-doors. Evenings would entail more shooting, or occasionally a game of tennis. This would be followed by a bath, a spell of comfortable

reading or chatting in his wife's company, and then dinner. After dinner he would either talk with friends and staff, or read and not even think of retiring for bed until around 1 or 2 a.m. There were, of course, variations to the routine.

Karni Singh and Sushila Kumari normally returned to Delhi in time for the budget session of Parliament in early spring. At Delhi, the MP would promptly become busy with his parliamentary duties! No matter how busy his day, however, the daily timetable used to invariably include either a round of golf or shooting at the ranges every single evening

Shooting competitions and other commitments permitting, around the end of April-beginning of May, the Bikaner family used to proceed to Bombay for their annual summer visit. This normally lasted till early July. Once again, 'Devi Bhawan' on Napean Sea Road, the Bikaner house where Karni Singh and his sister and brother had played as children, during the time of Maharaja Ganga Singh, would come alive with a buzz of mad activity.

While the children followed their own routine, Karni Singh would spend his time in a relaxed manner, meeting friends and shopping (or at least window-shopping) every single day, followed by a round of golf in the evenings, and very often a movie at night. Many friends recall him sporting colourful half-sleeve-shirts and gaudy golf sports-shirts during these summer months in Bombay.

At times, when shooting competitions beckoned, the period between June and September would be spent abroad by Karni Singh and his wife As far as possible, however, he would attempt to return to Delhi in time for the monsoon session of Parliament.

Karni Singh always returned to Bikaner for the festival of Dussehra, where his presence at the public Dussehra celebrations was keenly awaited each year. If feasible, he would also try and spend about 20 days or so in Bombay during the month of November, before returning to Delhi for the winter session of Parliament. Then the cycle would start afresh!

While Karni Singh travelled frequently, either on parliamentary work, or for shooting, invariably accompanied by his Maharani, Rajyashree and Madhulika used to spend the school year at the family's sprawling house on Delhi's Prithviraj Road, surrounded by beautiful gardens on three sides, with its own badminton court and above ground pool.

However, despite his busy work-schedule, Karni Singh always had time for his family. His older daughter recalls that, "After a long and exhausting day spent in his duties to serve the people as their M.P., I would normally find Daddy late at night in his bed, trying to relax with a book and eating some pieces of toast. His duties to his people kept him away from me and the family for most of the day, but now in the evening ... was 'our time' together. In my childhood, I would use this time to bring my toys and dolls to him and as I played behind a sofa in his bedroom I would discuss various topics with him. I would make up all kinds of stories and, tired as he was, he would listen patiently and take very serious interest. When my bed time came I would quickly cuddle to Daddy in his bed and he would plead on my behalf for me to be allowed a few minutes more."

The Maharaja and his older daughter shared a special rapport. Sometimes this unwittingly, though not deliberately, excluded the other two children. Over the years this bond grew stronger, specially after Rajyashree took to shooting and later participated with her father in national and international shooting competitions. If the Maharaja was thrilled when Rajyashree began to be referred to as the 'Chip' to his being the 'Block', the Princess admits to being very possessive of her father, so much so that as a child she was even jealous of his beloved spaniel, Nina. To her, her father was always "... a larger than life figure, handsome, strong, honest, caring person. A rock of Gibraltar in my life. A man always willing to listen to the problems of others, always willing to help. A solid genuine person."

"How emotionally dependent I was on him became evident when in 1959 both my parents decided to take an around the world trip," Rajyashree Kumari acknowledges. "I was six years old at the time and my younger sister, Madhulika, three years. They must have discussed it between themselves and come to the conclusion that the best action would be not to inform us, as we would quite naturally be very upset at the thought of a long separation. So an elaborate plan was prepared, and one evening I was told that as a special treat I would be allowed to go to a late night showing of a film called *Escapade in Japan*. On my return I was, of course, devastated to find both my parents gone. My father knew that I would be upset and he had thoughtfully left a letter explaining everything. The letter was full of love and reassurance but I can still to this day recall the terrible sense of emptiness at coming home and discovering that he was

not there. I had not before that day, or since that day until the news of the tragic demise of my father reached me, experienced such a depth of loneliness and sadness."

"My parents must also have missed us very much as, within a few days of their departure, my father sent instructions to have a photograph taken of my brother, my sister and myself, and for it to be posted to him abroad. So, we were dressed up and taken to the studio. Things went wrong immediately. My sister burst into tears and kept it up for quite some time to the utter horror of the photographer. To add to his stress, I had a temper tantrum and the studio was full of the most dreadful sounds of crying and shouting. Somehow, peace and calm was restored and by a miracle the photographer managed to take a photo which showed three smiling angelic faces. The photo completely belied the fact of the chaos and mayhem preceding it and subsequent to it. In any event, my parents must have been delighted, and relieved, to see three happy smiling faces."

During the period of my father's trip abroad came my seventh birthday and I fully expected to spend the day alone, without my parents, without presents. I should have known better. Somehow he had managed to get delivered to me on that day two presents; a large soft cuddly toy in the shape of a black poodle dog with cutest red tongue, and a magnificent walkie-talkie doll called 'Bella Bambina'. I still have them both and they remind me of both the desolation I felt at the sudden absence of my father, and his loving consideration in thinking of me even though he was on a hectic tour abroad He never failed to write to me from each city he visited. He always kept in constant touch throughout his entire life, no matter where he was, no matter how busy he was."

The Maharaja always brought back lots of cartoon-films for his children from his foreign trips when they were little. As they grew up and their tastes changed, he happily took their detailed teenager shopping lists with him and bought whatever he could find with as much enthusiasm as he had done earlier with toys and cartoon films.

The Maharaja also felt a deep sense of responsibility for the entire extended family of the House of Bikaner, which included his cousins and distant relatives as well. In the mid 1960s, with the passing away of Maharaja Karni Singh's great-aunt; the widow of Maharaja Dungar Singh, the last link with an older generation had snapped But while alive (and residing lived in the Junagarh fort where she had first come as a

young bride in the early 1880s), the old Dowager-Queen had enjoyed every mark of respect due to her. Karni Singh always treated her as a senior member of the family, akin to a grandmother. He and his family always called upon her when they returned to Bikaner from Delhi. For the Maharaja's young daughters their old great-great-aunt was the *'Gadh-wala dadi-sa'* — 'the grandmother who lives in the fort.'

Karni Singh doted on his grandchildren too. The three daughters of his son Narendra Singh, Daksha, Siddhi and Mahima (b. December 23, 1975) carry memories of a loving grandfather, who made time to teach them painting and shooting and play with them at Bikaner. Similar memories are shared by his other three grandchildren, Madhulika Kumari's son Rai Sinh (b. March 20, 1976) and Rajyashree's children, Anupama and Sajjansinh (b. May 16, 1980).

In the *Dr. Karni Singhji Maharaja of Bikaner Commemorative Volume*, Siddhi Kumari wrote about her loving grandfather. "... All the grandchildren were very close to his heart. He delighted in our childish pranks and we loved him dearly. He would always bother himself about our comforts, our education, our health and other sundry requirements and gave us whatever we wanted. Himself fond of chocolates he kept us well stocked with them. He was a very kind hearted and generous person .. [and] a pillar of strength and a dictionary on any subject He had a vast all-round knowledge and was desirous of inculcating the same in his children. He invariably kept me close to him while he worked on his cinematography and photography. He encouraged us to take up gardening and would stroll around with us questioning and correcting our knowledge of flowers and vegetables. Gardens formed a prominent part of our training." (1991:33).

He wanted them to share in the things that he enjoyed — for instance shooting and painting "Modern art painting and shooting were two of his greatest loves and he spent much of his time encouraging us to take up and develop these pursuits," remembers Anupama Kumari "Somehow, I never cultivated the deep devotion and enthusiasm for these hobbies that he himself had for them. Nevertheless, just seeing his happy reaction when I shot several cartridges or produced a modern art painting was enough for me to want to continue and share doing something that made him happy."

At Bikaner, Daksha Kumari and as many of the other grandchildren who were present would be invited to join him in creating a group work

of art. "I could not understand the riot of colours," recalls Siddhi Kumari, "and said so one day. He laughed and explained to me; quoting Havell, he said: 'not to extract beauty from nature but to reveal life within life, the reality within unreality and the soul within matter'. He also wrote it down for me to remember."

During his annual summer visits to England, Karni Singh also enjoyed creating graphics and art-works on the computer with his grandson Sajjansinh. The two would also spend hours playing computer games together. "Grandfather was constantly at work. 'I will drink life to the lees' (Tennyson) he would say," states Siddhi Kumari. "Either he was doing his MP's work (as long as he remained one), or pursuing any of his hobbies."

Since another of Karni Singh's interests was photography. Whenever the mood struck him, he would send for his camera and start photographing the grandchildren. This was something his children were familiar with, for they had been photographed themselves, over and over again, all through their growing up years. "His favourite expression, right up to the end, was 'Now stand together and look friendly', and we would do just that, even if we weren't feeling particularly friendly just at the moment!" recall Karni Singh's daughters.

"I remember how my cousins and I would mischievously hide from him in Lallgarh when he suddenly decided that he wanted to spend a couple of hours taking photographs of his beloved grandchildren," says Anupama Kumari. "During the winter holidays, as soon as we saw his camera bag being brought into the garden, we knew that we were to be grandfather's 'victims' for that morning!"

While a true doting grandfather for all six of the third generation, Karni Singh shared a special bond with Anupama Kumari, the daughter of his favourite child. "From far back as I can remember," states Anupama, "my grandfather was a very important and prominent fixture in my life. Despite the fact that we lived in different countries, physically separated by thousands upon thousands of miles, mentally our bond was very strong. We used to write to each other every week, and I would relish the weekly phone calls he would make. His letters were always a joy to read, forever filled with animated stories of what was happening in India, or something amusing that someone had done or said. Each and every letter was completed with an abstract drawing or a cartoon illustration of ourselves. They were filled with laughter, warmth and happiness;

qualities which reflected the wonderful man himself."

The special link between Karni Singh and 'Bunny' (the pet-name by which he called Anupama) may, in part, have had something to do with the fact that the Maharaja's daughter, Rajyashree Kumari, was a common factor. Whatever the reason, their empathy was so strong that relatives were not really surprised when the middle-aged Karni Singh caught mumps in Bombay around the same time that Anupama had mumps in England, 4000 miles away! The grandfather's explanation for this very peculiar coincidence was that he was very close to Bunny as they were both born within three days of each other.

"I remember, as a little girl, sitting on his knee and being fed cheese and crackers with great enthusiasm," says Anupama. "Every summer he and my grandmother would come and spend a couple of months with the family in England. It was a time everyone looked forward to. My brother and I would savour the fact that our grandfather was completely ours for the next two months. Our precious time was spent chatting, shopping, eating out, sitting in the garden and going for long walks to the park — where amongst the beauty of the trees and the colourful flowers the camera inevitably had to come out at least once."

On one of his visits to England, recalls Rajyashree Kumari, when he witnessed his older daughter complaining to her children over the way they had spread their toys and belongings all over the floor of her room, Karni Singh admonished her saying *she* used to do the same and *he* never complained!

The six grandchildren rarely knew him as an angry grown-up. Says Anupama, "There are not many memories I have of him ever being angry with me, except once or twice, and that too when I was a little girl. I remember his 'punishment' if I was ever naughty. He would first look extremely disapproving and sternly rebuke me for whatever I had done or not done as the case might have been. Then he would lightly slap the palm of my hand — just once, and that as far as he was concerned was the end of the 'punishment'. I think the last reaction he expected was for me to run sobbing to my room, where I stayed feeling completely miserable for the rest of the day. I think if anyone else had done what he had done I would most likely have forgotten about it the moment it was over. However, because my grandfather so seldom got angry, it was a big thing when he reprimanded me. His disappointment in me was my disappointment in myself and the realisation that I, who would have

done anything to please him, and could have put him in such a state for him to slap my hand, however gently, was more than my guilty little mind could bear."

For Anupama Kumari, "Primarily he was a best friend first, and grandfather second. Someone who filled my life with delight, laughter, love and a strong sense of security. Nothing was left wanting." Only fourteen-years old when her grandfather died, she acknowledges that "There is one regret I have. Neither of us ever said how much we cared for and loved each other. In our hearts the words were always there, but somehow they never passed through our lips. Perhaps we thought that those days of seemingly everlasting happiness would last forever — that they would never end. How wrong we were."

If Karni Singh was a warm, loving family man at heart, his keen sense of responsibility and continuity with the past did not allow him to think only in terms of family. He made it a point to attend weddings or other functions in the families of the ex-nobles of Bikaner state, and old retainers etc. He also made every effort to attend any function or gathering outside Bikaner where a citizen of Bikaner was being felicitated. A spontaneous person, he often stopped the car outside Gajner or at railway crossings, remember his children, and talk to the people there. Often youngsters would be asked about the games they played and this would be followed up by the gift of some cricket equipment, or some footballs, or even cycles.

If Karni Singh never lost his sense of inherited responsibility, he never flaunted his titles either. From his early youth there had been a strong egalitarian streak in Karni Singh, and in later life, he preferred to be addressed as 'Dr. Karni Singh', rather than 'Your Highness'. This was perhaps a trait he shared with his brother, who in later life identified himself as plain A.S. Rathore, rather than as Maharaj Amar Singh.

As youngsters, this democratic streak had come to the fore when it came to the issue of returning public salutations. During the reigns of their grandfather and father it was the custom for the Maharajas to return a public salutation by raising one hand in what can best be described as a 'semi-civilian military salute'. This is frozen in time in many photographs of processions in which Maharaja Ganga Singh and Maharaja Sadul Singh can be seen returning public greetings. When Karni Singh and his brother, Amar Singh, grew up and began to go out in public, however, they decided that they would both return salutations by the

traditional *haath-jodna* — placing the palms of both hands together in greeting.

At the time, this was a new custom for the Bikaner ruling family. Given the changed world in which both the princes spent a substantial portion of their adult years, however, it was a habit more in keeping with a democratic republic.

Not only was this egalitarian streak a part of Karni Singh's mental make-up, he also had the ability to make friends easily. Among his friends were ranked people from all walks of life. His Maharani is of the opinion that there is no place the two of them had been to — in India or abroad, on the road or in an aeroplane — where the Maharaja did not meet someone he knew, and get involved with in a lengthy conversation.

"Daddy was a naturally very gregarious person," asserts Rajyashree. "He was happiest in company, chatting, discussing, learning, and giving advice on subjects on which he had considerable experience. He got on with people of all ages, classes, rich or poor, world leaders or small children."

An example of this which his staff never forgot took place in 1951 Sometime after becoming Maharaja of Bikaner, Karni Singh flew to Suratgarh in his aeroplane to meet members of the Lund University team carrying out archaeological excavations at the site of Rangmahal, under the direction of Dr. Hanna Rydh. The Maharaja lunched with the excavators and heard all about their work, which appealed to the historian in him, and which he found to be extremely interesting. Later Dr. Rydh sent him a copy of the book based on the team's work at Rangmahal, because he had impressed the excavation-team with his erudition While Karni Singh had succeeded, on the one hand, in striking a chord with archaeologists, that particular visit to Suratgarh became memorable for another reason too. For, just as Karni Singh was disembarking from his plane at Suratgarh, a burly Jat rushed up and embraced him in greeting!

Says Anupama Kumari, "Anyone I have met who ever came into contact with him have only had good things to say. Everyone loved and respected him. And it is these words of praise and high sense of affection from people who had only met him once or twice that makes my heart swell with pride for the man who made such a great impact on everybody"

During the long reign of Maharaja Ganga Singh, the ruling family of Bikaner had enjoyed cordial relations with the princely families of

innumerable Indian States besides British and European royalty, aristocracy and officials. These included, among others, the princely families of Danta, Patiala, Gwalior, Palanpur, Rewa, Dungarpur, Pratapgarh, Kota, Udaipur, Idar, Wankaner, Jodhpur, and a host of others.

Throughout his growing-up years, Karni Singh encountered several of these family-friends during the annual visits to Mt. Abu or Bombay. In addition to this, many of the Indian princes visited each other on special occasions Karni Singh was, thus, well acquainted with much of the Indian royalty of his era, and he always tried to maintain these older family links throughout his life.

One special friendship, which also gave Karni Singh a particular sense of clan pride, was with the ruling family of Jodhpur. The centuries old uneasy relationship between the Rathores of Jodhpur and Bikaner, scions of a common heritage, had been formally resolved by the inimitable Maharaja Ganga Singh. Subsequent to that, the rulers of Bikaner and Jodhpur had maintained a close friendship, so much so that Karni Singh regarded his Jodhpur counterpart and fellow-clansman, Hanwant Singh, like a brother or cousin.

Karni Singh had a strong feeling for the clan of the Rathore Rajputs from which he was descended. His study of history left him only too aware of the fact that clans and cousins and families had undergone periods of rivalry, turbulence and even warfare. However, there had always remained an underlying notion of blood-ties and ancient promises, and if one Rathore kingdom had sometimes gone to war against another, they had also come to the assistance of each other on other occasions.

It was this sense of clan pride which led him to state that, "I will endeavour, as long as I am alive, to maintain this brotherhood between the nine Rathore States of Jodhpur, Bikaner, Idar, Sitamau, Jhabua, Ratlam, Kishangarh, Sailana and Alirajpur, all of whom were ruled by the Rathores in 1947 when the Indian nation-state became independent We are proud of our heritage and our ancestry In history, brother has fought brother, but in times of difficulty and vicissitude, the brotherhood always united and fought together. All the Rathore kingdoms are one brotherhood." Some years later, when a museum and display gallery was eventually set up within the old fort, it was this display of brotherhood which led Karni Singh to personally ensure that nothing was portrayed in a manner that could hurt the feelings of the other 'brother-states'.

Once the Raj Dadi-Saheb (Queen Grandmother) Badan Kumari of Jodhpur (widow of Jodhpur's Maharaja Umaid Singh, mother of the late Maharaja Hanwant Singh and grandmother of Maharaja Gaj Singh), was visiting Bikaner, accompanied by her young grandson, Maharaja Gaj Singh of Jodhpur. From childhood Karni Singh had been very fond of his Jodhpur aunt, and she had reciprocated his affections, always addressing him like a son as "Karni *beta*".

In the course of their visit, Karni Singh escorted his Jodhpur relatives to see the Maharaja Rai Singh Trust Museum he had set up within the old fort. As they approached the fort, someone pointed out to her all the old shell craters on the side of Junagarh fort which had been caused by Jodhpur guns centuries ago, when Jodhpur forces had surrounded Bikaner city.

The Raj Dadi-Saheb of Jodhpur immediately turned to her Bikaner host, with the utmost affection. "Karni *beta*," she declared "I am going to bring a large *karhai* (vessel) full of cement and your nephew, the Maharaja of Jodhpur, will, with his own hands, fill in the craters caused by these shells all those years ago " It was a highly emotional moment. Her words, stated Karni Singh, "brought tears to my eyes". The sentiments expressed by the visiting Raj Dadi-Saheb of Jodhpur were all the more meaningful for Karni Singh, given his strong views about clan and family ties.

At the same time, clan feelings did not serve to turn Karni Singh into a narrow-minded bigot who had no time for any one not of his own group. On the contrary, one of the many aspects that Karni Singh had enjoyed about his stint at St. Stephen's college had been the fact that he had the opportunity of making friends with students from different parts of India, irrespective of caste, class and creed.

For his college mates, he remained 'Karni'. That he was also a prince was secondary. For the rest of his life, 'Karni — the tennis player' was always remembered at all the college sports dinners. As far as possible, he would make it a point to attend these and other college reunions and functions regularly and was thrilled whenever he was invited to preside over them. It gave him equal joy when, in 1982, he was asked to preside over the annual function and prize-giving of his former college. His Maharani gave away the prizes while he took on the task of making the speech. Former college-mates always had a special place in Karni Singh's heart, and when he met any of them — as for example Santosh Mad[illegible]-

Karni Singh used to enjoy settling down for a good long chat.

In the shooting fraternity, Karni Singh had more friends than could be counted, and that too scattered all over the globe! In fact, while undeniably close to the Bikaner-Kota group of shooters like Thakur Kalu Singh, Apji Kalyan Singh, Devi Singh, and of course his Uncle the Maharao of Kota, Karni Singh was friendly with all his contemporaries in the shooting world of India and abroad.

Among others, Karni Singh regarded Randhir Singh in the light of a favourite nephew and took as much pride in his performance as he did for Rajyashree Kumari and for his Kota cousin, Bhuvaneshwari Kumari. At the same time, he was always very free with his advice and assistance, whether it was for a team-mate or a rival shooter, and earned the friendship and respect of all shooters who came into contact with him.

Besides fellow-shooters and NRAI officials, there were innumerable others who counted themselves as friends and played vital roles in the field of sports Among them were Bhakt Darshan Singh (then Education Minister), Major-General Bhagwati Singh (then General-Officer-in-Command Delhi and Rajasthan) who made available shooting ranges at the Republic Day Parade Grounds at Delhi Cantonment, and Sardar Joginder Singh, who was a prominent guest, in his capacity as the Governor of Rajasthan, at the marriage of Karni Singh's daughters

Golf and tennis were two other spheres in which he had an enviable number of friends. 'Karni — the tennis player' was, of course, well known to many; the case was not much different on the golf courses of Delhi and Bombay Prince Raj Singh of Dungarpur, Karni Singh's brother-in-law and well-known Indian cricketing personality, recalls the time when his Jijo-sa (as he called Karni Singh) spent long hours helping their friend Farouq Bharucha with adjusting to a new grip in golf so that Bharucha's multiple sclerosis would not come in the way of his playing and enjoying his golf.

"My brother-in-law was an extremely considerate man," acknowledges Raj Singh Dungarpur. "He always left a lasting impact on the people who came into contact with him, and I've never come across anyone who has had ill to say of him. Don't get the impression that he was a meek-and-mild person, though. He wasn't! And he could be absolutely single-minded when the need arose. If something need be done, he would achieve it — or certainly try his very best to achieve it .. It is a strange thing to say, but there have been times [after her demise]

when I have sat and thought about him. He was one of those people you can never forget."

A close friend and confidante of Karni Singh was the Thakur of Sankhu, Heer Singh, or 'Bill' as he was called by the Maharaja. Since Bill also moved to Delhi during the months that Karni Singh was in residence there, he and his family were always regarded as part of the larger Bikaner establishment. Close friends of Karni Singh say that he was a 'one-room man'. Given a choice, he preferred to have his meals, receive his guests and play his music all in one large living-cum-sitting room.

The friendships made during his parliamentary career cut across divisions of party allegiances. In a similar way, he counted many foreign diplomats, prime ministers, presidents and princes among his vast circle of friends. Asu Ram, who had tossed up coins for the Bhanwar Saheb Karni Singh in their childhood and subsequently seen service with the grown-up prince up till 1980, was a witness to the constant stream of parliamentarians, ministers and other government people, Indian princes and foreign dignitaries who visited Karni Singh.

While the family friendship between Bikaner and the British Royals went back a couple of generations, Karni Singh was personally closer to Lord Mountbatten of Burma. The latter had been a friend of Maharaja Sadul Singh from the period of their mutual childhood, and the connection had never weakened.

On one occasion, while on a visit to England in July 1973, Karni Singh was invited along with his Maharani, elder daughter and her husband, to have dinner with Lord Mountbattern at Broadlands, his estate in Romsey. The three hour drive from London to Romsey passed off very comfortably, and the guests spent a pleasant afternoon, followed by tea at Lord Mountbatten's home. The erstwhile Maharaja of Patiala was also present.

After tea, they were shown around the Mountbatten estate, and the former Maharaja and Maharani of Bikaner, as well as the former Maharaja of Patiala, were invited to plant a tree-sapling each to commemorate their visit. Later, they were all asked to sign Lord Mountbatten's visitor's book. Their host insisted that Karni Singh write his name as the Maharaja of Bikaner. When Bikaner's erstwhile Maharani Sushila Kumari pointed out that this was not correct, since all titles had been constitutionally abolished, Lord Mountbatten over-ruled her objections

by saying that for him Maharaja Karni Singh remained 'His Highness of Bikaner'!

A formal dinner party rounded off the extremely congenial visit to Romsey, and the guests left well after midnight, to return to the Westbury Hotel through a heavy downpour of rain. They took with them warm memories of their old family friend, and his hospitality. They also carried back a striking impression of the museum-like house at Romsey and the beautiful paintings and objets d'arts within it, which later went on display in the Mountbatten Museum at Romsey. They met again in England the following summer, and Karni Singh was to maintain the close friendship between the two families until his demise.

Not only did Karni Singh have the ability to make friends easily, his early training had enhanced his skills at being able to talk to people from all walks of life with ease. Speaking about his experiences as a Member of Parliament, he admitted that he had to learn "... the art of speaking to physically handicapped or blind people, or [those] who belonged to socially depressed classes, and never let them feel they were in any way inferior or lacked faculties This is something most of us have to learn. It comes naturally to a few; but most of us have to learn that in public service you never hurt anybody."

Karni Singh once reflected aloud on tape that "... the twenty-five years that I had the honour to be the MP from the Bikaner-Churu Parliamentary constituency drove home the point to me that [human] relationships were the most important things.... Throughout my tours and elections campaigns I have had an enormous amount of love shown to me.... I have also had the opportunity to see hostility in the eyes of people towards me because of my caste — a thing in which I never believed myself, but which did stand out in the eyes of some people who were caste-conscious. But this was evident only during election-fever and subsided soon after. I enjoyed meeting people in the villages, having tea with them, talking, trying to understand their problems. But I came to one conclusion, that due to my rushed programmes, which had become a way of life, I could never sit down and get to know all these people properly, and therefore loudspeakers and microphones became the means of communication. Whatever it was, it was rewarding."

If Karni Singh made a good friend, he also was not one to harbour grudges. Inspite of his personal views about Mrs. Gandhi's autocratic streak, the Emergency, and the manner in which she rail-roaded the

abolition of privy purses and rights, he did not retain bitterness any towards her. Upon hearing of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984, Karni Singh, who was at Bikaner, recorded his immediate reaction on a cassette. "... It is a sad day. In a democratic country like ours people should think in terms of negotiations and talks rather than taking peoples lives. I remember Mrs. Gandhi used to be at the various meetings of the Opposition leaders when she presided, and I have carried some very interesting memories of her. Admittedly, politically she tried to finish the Princes, but this is certainly no time to think of those days, but rather to feel the great sense of loss that her exit from the Prime Ministership and from her important role has created, and the vacuum that this has created."

"No matter what anybody can say, she was one of the great prime ministers of our country. Perhaps one of the greatest. Pandit Nehru, Mrs. Gandhi and Mr. Shastri were each great in their own way," he continued. The same evening he spoke about the assassinated Prime Minister on the Hindi programme of the local All India Radio, Bikaner, and condoled her death publicly

The next day, he mused into the cassette-recorder, "I remember the date of Nehruji's demise [27th May, 1964]. I was coming from Bombay in an aeroplane and somewhere halfway we heard that he had passed away. I went immediately to the Prime Minister's house and stood in a queue to pay my last homage to a great man. Similarly, on the date of his cremation, we stood on the side of the road to watch the cortege being taken away When Lal Bahadurji died I was, perhaps, in Bikaner and went immediately by train to Delhi, and when I laid a wreath on his body All India Radio announced that the Maharaja of Bikaner had placed a wreath on the late Prime Minister's body. Those were sad days when these great men went. Now Mrs. Gandhi is the third Prime Minister to die in office — under very savage conditions, which is very sad."

"When I met Mrs. Gandhi about two months ago in Delhi, in connection with presenting a memorandum of behalf of the shooters to exempt target shooting weapons from the Arms Amendment Act of 1983, in the very short span that I was with her she expressed her grave concern over the problem of extremists that the country faced And I told her that I was sure she would know how to deal with it Today [1st November], as I sit and watch the T.V, it feels a bit strange," he continued.

"For twenty-five years I had always been in Parliament and in the

middle of things, and when great leaders died, I had always been personally present or went to Delhi. The same had happened when Mr. Govind Ballabh Pant died. Now sitting in Bikaner, watching T.V., I feel a bit restless not knowing what to do!" These feelings were not those of an angry man, but rather of a concerned citizen, mourning a long-standing colleague.

This lack of bitterness; the intense feeling of friendship that emanated from him, made him unforgettable to those who came into contact with him.

For his daughter-in-law, Padma Kumari, a princess from the erstwhile state of Chamba, in the Himalayan hills, Karni Singh was always a kindly father-figure. In turn, Karni Singh was appreciative of Padma Kumari's help in running what he described as "my very chaotic household at Lallgarh Palace." The princess remembers how, in all the years she saw him, her father-in-law never lost his temper. "I never ever saw him really angry," she says.

Someone else who admits to having never seen him angry is Dr. Digvijay Sinhji of Wankaner, cousin to Karni Singh's Maharani Sushila Kumari. According to Digvijay Sinh, "Maharaja Dr. Karni Singhji was a person on whose face I had never seen consternation or a frown and I had never seen him in anger. A gentle person who put people around him at ease with his candid talk and humorous remarks, the rare occasion when I saw him bitter was when the Constitution of India was amended to scrap the Privy Purses and Privileges of Princes. It was not the loss of revenue that hurt him but the breach of faith and the broken promise and he never compromised on this issue. When the Government offered a paltry sum on an 'ad hoc' basis as a parting-shot for keeping former rulers and their establishments maintained for a year or two, he never accepted the money. He considered it beneath his dignity to do so," (in *Dr. Karni Singhji Maharaja of Bikaner Commemorative Volume* 1991:31). "He was also an amateur architect and designer and did an excellent job in building Karni Bhawan in Bikaner and Moonlight Whispers in New Delhi — both functional and yet elegant buildings of the ideal size for the requirement of his family and himself."

A liking for animals was also strong in Karni Singh. During his college days Karni Singh's springer spaniel Nina had been a special favourite, accompanying him for his round of golf and for car rides She remained a loyal shadow in later years too, and his children grew up

knowing both Nina and another spaniel, Mickey. However, the severe dust allergy that troubled him persistently from the 1970s onwards eventually constrained him from having prolonged contact with animals in later life.

With a preference for the casual in his attire, Karni Singh was most comfortable wearing cotton kurta-pyjamas, with the kurta having short-sleeves ('half-sleeves'), in place of the more usual long-sleeved ones worn by most people. He also liked wearing bush-shirts. During winter, Karni Singh wore a suit, though here again, his preference was for the casual trousers and pullover combination. He had even designed a special zipper-jacket that he called the 'Karni Jacket'. For formal functions, of course, he dressed as the occasion demanded in suits complete with all accessories.

When necessary he also wore a turban — the traditional *safa* of the Rathore Rajputs. Though Karni Singh had learned to tie his own *safa* as a young boy, the task normally fell to Asu's lot. Asu Ram recalls that his *An'ta* didn't like to keep his turban on for too long, and promptly took it off as soon as he returned home after a function — a trait Karni Singh shared with his brother. At the same time, Karni Singh never wore open-toed sandals and chappals outside his bedroom door He liked to wear pumps or slip-on shoes rather than lace-up shoes, but was not rigid in the matter.

Another characteristic feature was the fact that, though Karni Singh remembered the childhood lesson learned from his mother about not wasting money on one's self, he was an extremely generous man towards others. Anupama Kumari and Sajjansinh remember that, "The moment he would arrive in England, suitcases were unpacked and out would come tumbling countless gifts he himself had picked out from Bombay or Delhi. Pocket calculators, colourful dresses and Archie comics were just a few of the innumerable items. The gifts were always self-chosen He could have easily sent someone out to buy presents for his grand-children, but he never did It meant a lot to him to have a personal touch on the things he gave to the people he cared for" On what was to be his very last visit to England, he took two clocks in the shape of cockerels, which periodically crowed very loudly, as presents for his grandchildren

The family was quite used to seeing such things, for they were well aware that Karni Singh loved gadgets and mechanical things Says Rajyashree Kumari, "My father was fascinated by gadgets and techno-

logical devices. Amongst the many sports which he played he particularly enjoyed golf, and one year he acquired a small machine into which the ball would be putted and the machine would automatically throw the ball back. Out of curiosity I put my finger into the machine and got an almighty shock. On another occasion, he got a weight reducing machine, and my sister and I spent more time on it than my father."

Karni Singh was not only keen on gadgets, but, more importantly, he was extremely particular about the proper use and maintenance of machinery. Improper fitting or usage would draw a protest from him, along with generous freely given advice. Dalip Singh remembers 'HH' returning from a meeting with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during the tense days of the Emergency. After telling his staff about the meeting, Karni Singh casually added that he had checked the PM over the new positioning of the air-conditioner in her office. Seeing the faces of his staff freeze into looks of startled panic, Karni Singh burst out laughing and said, "Well, the Prime Minister didn't mind, and a badly placed AC can give you joint pains, as I mentioned to her."

Ironically, for one whose ancestors had carved out a kingdom in the desert, Karni Singh felt the heat intensely, and in the years after his dust allergy became pronounced, he did not even try to spend summers in Bikaner. States his elder daughter, "I am sure Rao Bika would not approve of his descendants being so soft that they are unable to withstand the heat without the aid of fans and air-conditioners."

Of course, Karni Singh often toured his constituencies in hot weather when required, and his shooting often took him outdoors in sweltering temperatures whenever the occasional clay pigeon trials and sometimes even international events were conducted in warm climes. The Maharaja held, very clearly, that where duty called or if something had to be done the weather could not be allowed to come in the way.

"Once when I must have been six," remembers Rajyashree, "we went to Ramdeora which is a very famous temple on the border of Jodhpur and Jaisalmer and where my family often go to pay their respects. Normally it is in winter, but this time for some strange reason we set off in the middle of a particularly cruel summer. We went in a convoy of four cars, each specially rigged up with *khas tatas* [cooling screens of dampened vetivert grass] and they did their job very effectively, though it stopped us from looking out of the window making us very restless. The engines of the cars, not protected from the intense heat, gave up one

after the other, and we changed cars one by one till the last one gave up just at the gates of Gajner."

If there was any irony or poetic justice in a descendent of a hardy desert race not liking hot weather, and later developing dust allergy, it was equally strange that the Maharaja caught several of the ordinary childhood illnesses in his adult life His brother's tongue-in-cheek explanation is that, "During grandfather's time the germs would have been scared of attacking us"! An explanation that Karni Singh's sister accepted in part. She agreed that as children they were exceptionally well cared for, because if they as much as sneezed Maharaja Ganga Singh would have the doctors sent for. Whatever be the reasons, Karni Singh caught chicken pox when his children had them.

Rajyashree Kumari carries vivid memories of a family trip to Kashmir around 1961, when she was 8 years old. "The trip turned into a medical drama," she recalls. "My brother had, unknown to him, picked up chicken pox from his school. The virus was promptly passed around the family and we spent our stay in Kashmir surrounded by doctors. Daddy also caught the chicken pox virus and I was only allowed to see him after several days. When I did get to see him I got a terrible shock Instead of seeing my usual handsome Daddy there stood a heavily bearded man. I was about to run from the room in fright when he reassured me that he was the same old Dad but had been unable to shave due to a very heavy chicken pox infection."

However, despite such minor troubles, to an outside observer, Karni Singh's was a life without any apparent hurdles and brambles Born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, he had adapted himself to a changing outside world with dignity. Scion of a ruling family with a long history, he had been a voice of the people in modern India's uppermost democratic forums. Never lacking friends and well-wishers, both within and outside India, he had been brought up in a palace, travelled the world and won laurels for his shooting skills. What more could anyone wish for?

However, the sense of injustice over the manner in which the princes were humiliated at the time the privy purses went, never faded completely. Coupled with this was the distancing that gradually came to pass in the final years of his life between Karni Singh and his only son This was something that became increasingly painful for Karni Singh as he grew older. More so because Karni Singh had been extremely close to

his own father after he reached adulthood.

When Karni Singh had been a college student at Delhi, telegrams often flew thick and fast from him to H.H. Bikaner, as Karni Singh wrestled with sartorial matters like what to wear to a Viceroy's party, or re-inforced earlier suggestions to 'Father' to get an aeroplane.

He had, of course, realised over the years that a somewhat turbulent relationship existed between his revered father and beloved martinet of a grandfather. He also knew, though, that inspite of their occasional disagreements, both Ganga Singh and Sadul Singh in their own way, deeply cared for each other. When not marking official notesheets to 'Maharaj Kumar' (Sadul Singh) from 'H.H.' (Ganga Singh), seeking the former's views (and more often that not disagreeing with those proferred), Ganga Singh addressed the Maharaj-Kumar as his 'Dearest Hiru' (Sadul Singh's pet-name) and signed his letters as 'Your affectionate Father'; he meant it too[1]

With his own son, though, Karni Singh was unable to maintain the kind of carefree and yet dependent father-son relationship he had himself known with his own father. Narendra Singh showed every mark of respect, but was not able to have the sort of rapport with his father that Karni Singh yearned for. Karni Singh himself was unable to pin-point the cause for this, and as the decade of the 1980s advanced, the hurt became more pronounced.

This, along with other things, bothered Karni Singh the most in the last few years of his life. In addition, by 1985-86, a number of older trusted aides and assistants had passed away or retired They had run the palace and performed various duties with clockwork efficiency that had characterised Maharaja Ganga Singh's reign. With their departure from the scene, the work-load devolved on the aging Karni Singh Along with missing these long-standing aides, by this time his allergy was acute too. His allergy had started in the late 1960s, but it was in the last ten years of his life that it became really pronounced, preventing him from reading books unless the pages had been specially cleaned and so forth. Not surprisingly, therefore, though an inherently cheerful person, there were times when he felt that he was going through an unlucky patch[1]

It was in such a frame of mind that, on one occasion in 1985, Karni Singh ruefully noted a phenomenon which seemed to him to have plagued him throughout his public career. "One of the strangest things I've noticed has been that if I make a long-term engagement, knowing

at that time that the whole month is free, let the date come and ninety-nine times out of hundred some other clashing programmes will come before or after the date that I have given for the function and make life difficult! I've noticed this for at least the last thirty-five years, and right upto 1985 this type of jinx continues. It is very, very, annoying and aggravating."

Never a man to remain in an unhappy frame of mind for long though, Karni Singh emerged from this phase a stronger man, more at peace with himself, still happy to be shooting — though not competitively, still happy to paint, photograph, and as willing as ever to help others and his beloved India. This he would continue to do till the very end.

Twelve

IN THE SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE



WHILE THERE WERE MANY WHO LAUDED HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AS parliamentarian, Olympics shooter and sportsman, in his own eyes, Karni Singh always felt a degree of inadequacy about his work and general achievements. He measured himself against a strict yardstick — his late grandfather, Maharaja Ganga Singh, who remained a larger-than-life figure for more than three generations of Bikaneris. Certainly, all his descendants admitted to being overshadowed by their famous forebear.

Karni Singh neither ruled nor reigned over Bikaner, in the formal sense of the word, in the way that either his father or his grandfather had done. And yet, in his own way, he saw to it as a parliamentarian and a concerned individual that water channels, roads, market-towns, educational institutions, radio-stations, and all manner of other things essential for the well-being of the average citizen came to them. He may never have had the opportunity to redress wrongs in durbar as had his famous ancestors, but he carried the petitions of his constituents up to their equivalent post-Independence redressal agencies. Born a prince, he lived for much of his adult life as a citizen of a democracy, and yet he always tried to live up to what he saw as his duty and his inheritance by attempting to serve the people of the land to the best of his ability. This

was the task for which he had been prepared from his childhood. It was a task he could never bring himself to forsake.

In the years after leaving Parliament, Dr. Karni Singh continued to remain busy. He had always retained his deep commitment towards the well-being of the people of his erstwhile kingdom. In their turn, the Bikaneris genuinely respected Karni Singh.

For the majority he continued to be a father-figure, the *annadata*, even after the official abolition of princely titles and privileges. Consequently, even after quitting 'public life' as a parliamentarian, Karni Singh continued to make the voice of the area heard in the political and public sphere. Alongside his parallel 'career' as India's top clay pigeon shooter, the Maharaja had also been active in several other fields, including the establishment of several charitable trusts at Bikaner.

All through his formative years, Prince Karni Singh had been encouraged by his parents and grandparents to develop a sense of duty and a conscience that would guide him in looking after the interests of poor and deprived people. At the time, his elders had thought these attributes essential for a good future Maharaja. In the event, they became equally valuable guiding principles for the Karni Singh who lived as a patriotic citizen of India, serving his people till the very end

Karni Singh was, at heart, a man of simple habits, totally driven by his sense of duty and what he owed to his country and its people. Those who knew him well remember his insistence on being addressed as 'Dr Karni Singh' rather than as 'His Highness Maharaja Karni Singh'. Having spent much of his life in the limelight, in later years he sometimes admitted that he preferred sitting in a room and reading a book to conversing in club rooms

He loved sports, photography, painting, and flying. He also loved music, especially western symphony orchestra, western ballroom dancing, and reading. The last was something that became a problem for him in the last 5-10 years of his life, because by then his allergy had become so severe that even the minute dust from books used to aggravate it The 'special' treatment accorded to new books — namely giving them a quick dunk in a bucket of water and then drying the pages — became quite a ritual within the Lallgarh household. Ironically enough, newspapers did not affect this avid reader the same way that books did, however!

While he read practically everything that came his way, Karni Singh had a particular fascination for works on space, science and medicine,

besides fiction. He was a well-read and well-informed person, and many doctors who knew him at Bikaner recall with fondness the long discussions they had on medical matters.

A perfectionist by nature, Karni Singh always read-up or thoroughly researched anything he took up. If it came to shooting, discipline and dedication was the order of the day; in parliamentary matters it was being fully briefed and thorough. The streak extended to whatever he took up. His elder daughter cannot forget the time her father insisted she, accompanied by the other team-members, troop off at 4 a.m. for a television interview during the course of the shooting championship in Korea, saying that because they were representing India and their presence was required, present they would have to be!

He often wrote articles on shooting and, less frequently, on current topics relating to national policy. His preferred language for such writing was English. The articles would then be translated into Hindi and circulated locally too. Of course, he was totally fluent in Hindi as a result of his upbringing. Karni Singh loved nature too, and passed on this love to his children and grandchildren.

A widely travelled man, who had first set foot on foreign soil in 1943 when he went to the Middle East war front with his grandfather, Karni Singh enjoyed seeing new places and meeting new people. His 1949 European tour had been followed by a round-the-world trip in 1959. After this Rome (1960), Oslo (1961), Cairo (1962), Bangkok, Singapore and Japan (1963) and Rome, Hongkong, Burma and Angkor Wat (1964), followed one after another. From the decade of the 1960s till his demise in 1988, his shooting took him practically all over the world. In every case, he visited sports stadiums, museums and art galleries and made friends by the dozens.

Given his propensity for meticulous groundwork, Karni Singh always made thorough preparations before a visit to a foreign country by reading up on its history and so forth. For instance, before going to Mexico for the Olympics in 1968, he read extensively about that country, and once the competitions were over tried to visit as many museums as possible. Such measures, he stated, added to the quality of his travels abroad and made them more enjoyable and illuminating. An incorrigible photography-enthusiast, he also made it a point to capture the sights and sounds of places visited on rolls upon rolls of camera and movie film. The travel-films, with soundtrack specially added, were invariably shown to people

at Bikaner and Delhi upon his return to India, and were a highly appreciated feature for his children, friends and staff.

Coming from a princely background, Karni Singh's educational career had always been an uphill task, as at the time it was not considered necessary for royalty to go in for formal degrees. However, Karni Singh was determined to study and went on to obtain a Ph.D. He could be determined and strong minded where required even as a boy "I had always wanted to have a degree behind my name, because I knew a time was coming when life was not going to be so easy And that hunch has proved to be right, because all through my career in Parliament and later I found that having a sound education has given all these demagogues a slight inferiority complex," he once stated.

Contrary to commonly held views about Indian princes, Karni Singh's personality and personal life both were straight forward. His name was frequently in the news, but always in connection with a positive achievement in the field of sport, or social welfare, or politics, and not scandal! Karni Singh never epitomised the hard-drinking sybaritic image -that Indian Maharaja's were notorious for in many works of fiction; an image that a tiny minority of 20th century Indian princes had acquired!

Karni Singh once admitted to a British television interviewer ".. I have always been a socialist at heart because although I may live in a palace, my mind has always been close to people who were underprivileged, and I feel probably the most happy when I am travelling and meeting people who are not so well placed in life. Even in England, for instance, when I go around I meet people who are miners, people working on the roadside and in the pubs and all that. I enjoy talking to them. ...Whether you are a Maharaja or anybody else, you are a human being first, and as long as one feels that we have these human values to go by, then I think the other things are just trappings — like the coat you have on. It doesn't count, in a way."

"...The fact that I came from this family of 500 years of rulership automatically gave me a position whereby people came to me and respected me...... As far as these palaces are concerned, I would be as happy living here as I would living in a two-roomed house. It is a condition of mind, and all these beautiful things you see, these engravings and objects of art, they don't really contribute to a man's personal happiness "

Sir Jaywant Singhji K. Gohel, the father-in-law of Karni Singh's elder

daughter stated in the *Dr. Karni Singhji Commemorative Volume* about Karni Singh, "Throughout his life his motto was to serve his people and his nation faithfully and honestly. He could have had for the asking any of the highest offices in the land. He could have joined any of the political parties and ensure privileges and favourable treatment for himself and his family He could have accumulated untold wealth in the, sadly, corrupt atmosphere that has prevailed over the last twenty years in India He chose instead to stand for election as an Independent Member of the Lok Sabha and continue the family tradition of service to the people, and which he did for five terms and a total of 25 years. He could indeed have continued for many years more — the people wanted him to continue in politics, but he was never the one to hang on to anything at any price. He said he had a good innings in politics and that it was now time to move over and make room for a younger man... The nation lost an honest politician and a man of vision," (1991:17).

Towards the last few years of his life especially, Karni Singh was frequently asked by journalists and friends about what he would have liked to have been if he could have chosen a career for himself. His answer was invariably the same to all such queries. If it had been feasible, he told them, he would have liked to have been a medical doctor, or alternatively, to join the Air Force.

Medicine had always interested him, and though learning to be a future Maharaja subsumed other careers, Karni Singh retained a life-long interest in medicine, reading an enormous amount of literature on the subject and constituting himself the team 'quack' on occasions while participating in shooting events.

His second choice was dictated by his fascination for flying and for shooting. Given the combination, a younger Karni Singh had, in his teens, craved to become a fighter pilot in the Air Force. World War II was on, and being airborne with the Fighter Command, with its fast planes fitted with guns, was precisely the stuff dreams were made of, as far as the young Prince was concerned. Maharaja Ganga Singh had not, however, shared either his grandson's love for flying nor his ambitions to become an Air Force pilot; and though Karni Singh did a lot of flying in later years, it was never possible for him to make a career-choice in favour of the Air Force.

Years later, when hostilities broke out between India and Pakistan in December 1971, Karni Singh had promptly offered his flying-skills to

the Indian Air Force, but this time round too, he was unable to get his wish! It was hardly surprisingly, therefore, that when the Maharaja had taken to painting, he found expression for his thwarted teenager dreams of soaring in the skies through painting themes of aeroplanes, space and skies.

When a career inadvertently came the way of the Maharaja through his act of standing for elections in the first parliamentary elections of free India, it was something that was closer to everything for which Maharaja Ganga Singh had carefully prepared him throughout his childhood and youth — a man whole-heartedly and totally dedicated to the welfare of his people. Considering how much Karni Singh, at heart a quiet man, disliked making public speeches and being in the limelight, it is ironical that he ended up spending a quarter of a century as a Member of Parliament doing precisely those very things.

Always a man of varied interests, Karni Singh had been keen since boyhood on tennis, golf, cricket, motor cars, film-making, and photography, among other things. He had taken up flying as a young man, as soon as he was able to. However, his interest in painting developed only during the late 1950s. The Maharaja had always been an enthusiastic photographer, and enjoyed clicking pictures of his family members, nature scenes and places of tourist interest with equal avidity

In a personal recording on an audio-casette in 1986, intended to form part of his memoirs, Karni Singh confessed that "Photography has been my most consistent and most absorbing hobby And I would say that I rate photography as even more important than clay pigeon shooting, although, of course, I have got better known as a clay pigeon shooter"

It is a hobby that Karni Singh shared with his grandfather and father, both of whom enjoyed photography and movie film-making Between them, Maharaja Ganga Singh and Maharaja Sadul Singh had filled over 250 albums with photographs, some of them, taken by the former, going back to 1905 and even earlier — a valuable pictorial record of bygone days! In the final decade of his life, Karni Singh ensured that these old films and photograph albums were properly documented, handing them over into the custody of the Sri Sadul Museum of the Maharaja Ganga Singhji Charitable Trust for preservation as well as display

In his own case, taking up photography dated back to the year he was only five years old The Bikaner family was in Delhi on one occasion, when Karni Singh and his sister, Sushila Kumari, were suddenly en-

thused by photography on being presented with a camera each by their mother. The princess had been given a Brownie Box camera, while Karni Singh received a Box Tenjor — a small box camera, not unlike his sister's. They had both promptly gone to Okhla to practice taking photographs, and were quite pleased when the developed photographs showed extremely good results.

Initial interest in photography having been sparked, Karni Singh continued to use his Box Tenjor camera for the next few years with great enthusiasm. About three years later, he and his sister were both given a folding camera each. These had a one or two exposure setting. They took a quarter-size picture, and were considered excellent cameras at the time. The princess had a 6 3 lens on her camera, while her brother had a 7.7 lens

The interest in taking pictures flourished. In the meantime, always thorough in activities that he took up, in 1937, around the time he was thirteen, the young prince came across a special folding camera while looking up a catalogue of cameras This was the Zeiss Super Iconta square size, with a 2.8 lens. The camera cost about 342 rupees and was readily available in Bombay. The question was how to acquire it! At the time, General Hari Singh of Sattasar was, as custodian of the children, in charge of all their spending and accounts. Karni Singh therefore persuaded Hari Singhji to order the camera from Bombay.

When the new camera arrived, the prince was very excited and thrilled. Unfortunately for him, his mother got extremely annoyed when she learnt about the expensive camera. Strict about squandering of money on the part of her children, the Yuvrani felt that a Rs. 15/- or 20/- camera would have served just as well, and it needed considerable persuasion and explanations on the part of her eldest son before he was allowed to keep the camera. The prince went on to take many pictures of Maharaja Ganga Singh's Golden Jubilee celebrations with this camera.

Around this time in 1937, Maharaja Ganga Singh went to England on a visit. Karni Singh sent him a letter requesting a Rollicord camera with a case, with the words, "Rollicord with case. Please don't forget." The Maharaja selected a Rollicord which had been highly recommended by the Sayyids of the Palanpur ruling family. This was an advanced camera which Karni Singh was very happy to possess, and with which he did a lot of photography. Meanwhile, younger brother Amar Singh had gone in for a Retina 35mm. In the critical eyes of his older brother,

however, the end results were not so fortunate when Amar Singh took photographs!

The following year, the Nawab of Palanpur, His Highness Nawab Taley Mohammed Khan, brought a Contaxt 3 camera with a 1.5 sonar lens for young Karni Singh from England. The camera seemed the ultimate dream come true at the time for the teenaged prince, and he soon went on to win prizes in some photographic contests held by the *Illustrated Weekly of India*.

Collecting good lenses for the Contaxt 3 camera became the next logical step, and Karni Singh took up the task in all seriousness Luckily for him, around 1938-39, the ruler of Jodhpur, His Highness Maharaja Umaid Singh, became aware of Karni Singh's keen interest in photography during a visit to Bikaner. "I am going to send you children some junk", Maharaja Umaid Singh of Jodhpur told Karni Singh as he left Bikaner. The Maharaja of Jodhpur kept his promise by sending across a large number of elaborate photographic lenses as a gift

Over the years, Karni Singh was to acquire other, more advanced, cameras and lenses which he used extensively From the beginning, all the equipment was handled and looked after very carefully and filters and lens were added from time to time. Karni Singh also paid attention to the care and storage of negatives, and negatives dating back to 1938 remained accessible and good enough for taking further prints in their 'as is' condition, fifty years later!

Karni Singh had learned to do his own developing and printing when he was in his twenties. For several years thereafter, he had enjoyed doing his own printing and developing and was quite disappointed to give this up after developing an allergy to chemicals. However, he remained meticulous about cataloguing and preserving negatives and movie films

His interest in movie film-making dated from 1936. When at the age of twelve Karni Singh was presented a Cine Kodak 16mm camera and a 16mm Bellen Howell silent projector by his father. The boy filmed events so avidly thereafter that later his doting grandfather also presented him with a Kodak Magazine movie camera. In 1949, enroute to his first visit to Europe, Karni Singh purchased a Polex Pia 16mm turret lens movie camera in Bombay. With this new camera he shot nearly two thousand feet of sound track film, as he travelled through Egypt, England, France, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden This was the first time he went in for serious travel cine-photography The film was then sound-

striped on magnetic, Karni Singh having acquired a Bellen Howell sound-projector whereby magnetic striped films were made into movie films with sound tracking. This was the beginning of his life-long interest in travelogue films!

Besides travel-related films, which were always shared with a wider audience, the Maharaja also shot extensive footage in 16mm colour and sound at most of the shooting events he attended. Among these were the Olympics at Rome (1960), Tokyo (1964), and Mexico (1968), and various international shooting events at Oslo (1961), Cairo (1962), Japan (1963 Pre-Olympics), Weisbaden (1966), Bologna, Japan (both 1967), and San Sebastian (1969).

However, he frequently felt the strain of trying to do both serious filming and serious clay-pigeon shooting while a competitor in shooting events. As a result, by the time the 1972 Olympics at Munich came around, Karni Singh decided to concentrate only on his marksmanship and to restrict the other kind of 'shooting' to photography only in place of cinematography!

While the Maharaja was very serious about his photography, this hobby often had its hilarious moments too. His eldest daughter recalls one summer in Geneva, when her father decided that they would all go to Lake Geneva to take photographs with one of his special lenses — a mauve one that gave a star burst effect. Off they went with a local friend of theirs and the Maharaja immediately got busy with his camera. After a while, while trying to change the lens, he dropped it on the ground.

As the entire party watched, the lens slowly began to roll towards the lake, and before anyone could do a thing, it plopped in. Fortunately the friend accompanying them spoke to a man who was swimming in the lake at the time. The swimmer obligingly dived down a few times and finally retrieved the dripping wet errant special effects lens, much to the joy of its royal owner.

Given his liking for photography, Karni Singh had expressed his desire upon his retirement from Parliament to spend time on doing some serious creative photography with his new Olympus OM-2, and other cameras. This he managed to do. He had also hoped to bring out a collection of the different photographs taken by him in a book form, but unfortunately did not live long enough to do so.

Like photography, sports and games was an essential component of the life of Karni Singh. His daily routine always included, as far as

possible, either a round of golf or a game of tennis, or even both, as a matter of habit. As a boy, Prince Karni Singh had been brought up in an atmosphere of sports His grandfather, Maharaja Ganga Singh, had been an avid sportsman, who played all manner of games and sports. He had also been a renowned polo-player, whose Bikaner polo team had played in many tournaments across India and abroad. Karni Singh's father, Maharaja Sadul Singh, had been an equally renowned and more versatile sportsman who loved to play tennis, squash, polo and hockey on skates, in spite of suffering from heart-trouble Though not very tall at five feet seven inches, Sadul Singh was a strong man who was famous for his ability to hit a ball over the club building from one ground to the other, three times out of five. He was also acknowledged by his contemporaries as one of the world's top shooters.

Not surprisingly therefore, Karni Singh and his brother and sister grew up under a regimen of daily horse-riding and evening games They loved sports and tried to excel in various games and sporting events

When Karni Singh was a little older, Sadul Singh started him on tennis. During the Bikaner family's summer sojourn at Mt Abu, Karni Singh took to playing regularly at the club, where all sorts of competitions used to be organised. On one occasion in the late 1930s, two exceedingly good coaches — Omar Khan and Tahmas Khan — were brought over to Mt. Abu from Jamnagar, courtesy His Highness the Jam Saheb, to coach the two Bhanwar Sahebs of Bikaner, the princes Karni and Amar.

It was in 1936 that Karni Singh, with the future Nawab of Palanpur (then the Nawabzada or Crown-Prince) as his partner, won his first tennis competition at Mt. Abu. He later went on to win the First Prize in the Men's Open Championships at Mt. Abu, with Baney Singh, the Thakur of Khiyeran, as his partner. The finals of this were played at the Residency, in front of a huge crowd of onlookers, among whom was the Resident. Later, when Karni Singh went to St. Stephen's College at Delhi in 1944, he began playing tennis for the college. Karni Singh not only played regularly on his college team between 1944 to 1946, but also went on to captain St. Stephen's college one year, and very soon became famous in the Delhi University as 'Karni the tennis player'.

For all his love for the game, however, Karni Singh was occasionally disadvantaged in matches because of his weight. With wry humour, he sometimes remembered an exciting match played during his college days

which he lost simply because he was, at 203 pounds, too heavy to outlast and outrun his opponent! While he himself had played well that day, using his strong backhand to advantage, his opponent, Krishan B., happened to be a left handed player. Krishan B., consequently, was able to place shots off Karni Singh's backhand rather well and tire out the Bikaner crown-prince, while a group of Krishan B.'s supporters from Hindu College chanted "right-left, right-left" as a panting Karni Singh ran from one corner of the court to the other.

Karni Singh continued to play a lot of tennis in the years that followed, more so each time he was at Bikaner, though most of it was no longer competitive tennis, but for pleasure. He even carried on playing into his fifties, inspite of an operation on his right leg in November 1976, in which two bones were removed from his knee. After this, he was back to playing tennis within about six weeks though he was unable to run as much as earlier.

The bad knee was connected with an old injury dating back to 1946 when Karni Singh had dislocated his right knee while playing cricket. This had finally been aspirated by Dr. Menon. In 1949, when Karni Singh went to England, Dr. Tucker had examined the knee and advised certain electrical treatment, which had been duly taken. The knee had recovered fully after this, and Karni Singh was able to play all the games he liked so very much for the next twenty-six or so years before it gave any further trouble! When the knee again became troublesome in 1975, after a gap of more than twenty six years, Karni Singh once again consulted Dr. Tucker in England. On his advice, he went in for surgery. This was performed in Bombay by the well-known orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Dholakia. Five days after the operation, Karni Singh was back on his feet and walking, and six weeks later he was once again able to play tennis again and enjoy the game that had always given him so many hours of fun.

Cricket, squash and golf were also games at which Karni Singh had learnt to excel However, Karni Singh never felt the same satisfaction about his progress in squash as he did with tennis and golf, although he had played a lot of squash with his father and younger brother at Bikaner and Abu as a youngster.

Having played cricket throughout his childhood, Karni Singh found himself taking to the game rather more seriously in 1946 on a challenge from His Highness the Maharana of Udaipur. Within a short time, eight teams had been raised in Bikaner. These included the Lallgarh Palace and

the Army teams. Matches took place with regularity every Saturday and Sunday, and having accepted the challenge of the Maharana, the Bikaner team succeeded in winning the coveted Colvin Shield within a short period of two years.

In later years, however, though Karni Singh kept up his interest in cricket, he was not able to play very often himself. It was therefore a matter of happiness and pride for him when Madhulika Kumari, his younger daughter, grew up to demonstrate a flair for cricket and tennis. She even played at Bombay's Brabourne Stadium in the ladies team to the delight of her father.

Another game that Karni Singh had learnt to excel at was golf. He had been only seven years old when his father had given him his very first set of tiny golf clubs. Thrilled beyond words with the new gift, the little prince had taken to going out, all by himself, to the gardens of the North Wing of Lallgarh Palace in the mornings. Here he would practice solemnly, putting soft balls and golf balls alike with his tiny clubs.

From this he had graduated, as he grew older, to better clubs and skills especially after Mr. James of the Railways took to coaching him in golf. Eventually, Karni Singh played regularly at the Bikaner Golf Club near Shivbari. His serious love for the game of golf, however, began during the course of a month-long visit to Ootacamund in south India in the 1940s, during which golf was played every single day. It was also in the course of that trip that Karni Singh acquired a complete set of golf clubs made by Rangefinder of England from Chellaram's shop, one of the few places which stocked them.

This was the set Karni Singh played with throughout his college days at Delhi. Though St. Stephen's college itself did not offer any golfing facilities, Karni Singh became a member of the Delhi Golf Club, as also the Willingdon Sports Club, soon after joining college in the summer of 1944. However, Karni Singh found that golf had few followers in Delhi in the 1940s Barring the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, and a few others not many people played the game. Despite this, Karni Singh managed to play golf daily during his time in Delhi. Often he would go out with his driver and his dog, Nina. In later years he would swear that between the three of them they never lost a ball!

It was in 1952 that Karni Singh acquired his first fully matched golf-set by Henry Cotton and ended up playing a lot of golf in Bangalore He was, by now, a self-confessed "serious golf nut!" Karni Singh's love for

golf and tennis endured. Over time he collected more golf clubs while at the same time he continually improved his game.

From 1952 till around 1964 Karni Singh had played with a handicap of 18. He then decided he had to lower his handicap and came down to 12, then to 6, and finally to a handicap of 4. He remained a 4 at the Willingdon Sports Club at Delhi. It was at Delhi and Bombay that Karni Singh played much of his golf, though he did manage the occasional game during his visits abroad, as for example, at the Bonnie Pryor Golf Club in New York, which his friend Dr. Kazickas arranged.

Karni Singh's love for golf and clay pigeon shooting, both precision sports, requiring consistency, accuracy and diligence, reflected an aspect of his own personality — that of being thorough and whole-hearted in everything he took up, whether it was photography as a child, or flying as a young man, or public life during his days in the Indian Parliament.

Something else that had always enthralled Karni Singh was flying a plane. It was not uncommon for many of the Indian princes to fly their own aeroplanes in the '30s and '40s, but since Maharaja Ganga Singh was never keen on flying himself, nor for other members of his family to do so, it was only in Maharaja Sadul Singh's time that a plane was finally acquired by the Bikaner family.

Soon after this, Karni Singh acquired his personal Beechcraft Bonanza in 1948. In the interim, he had set about earning his wings and becoming a full-fledged 'A' license pilot. With this license under his belt, he was able to indulge his passion for flying to his heart's content!

The Bonanza had a range of almost one thousand miles with the auxiliary tank, and its owner enjoyed flying between Bikaner, Delhi and Bombay. Udaipur and Jodhpur were also on his regular air-map. It became, in later years, a common practice for Karni Singh to fly in to Delhi and use the hanger of the Delhi Flying Club, where he was Vice Patron, to park his craft. At Bombay, his destination was the Juhu airport, to which, in fine weather, he frequently made non-stop flights, sometimes accompanied by his wife and children. Many such flights were made in the early '50s.

Karni Singh was very happy with his Beechcraft Bonanza, and when it was sold several years later, he could not bring himself to seek a replacement. While the Maharaja did not average much night-flying or bad weather flying, as he did not have instrument rating, he managed to do a considerable amount of flying all the same.

Motor cars also remained a life-long interest. Over the years, however, the grey Rolls Royce, Buicks, Chevrolets and other cars of his childhood and youth — including a Lasalle Convertible which he acquired in Bombay in 1943 in exchange for his Buick — had given way to a gleaming white Cadillac by 1956. This was followed up by the acquisition of two Thunderbirds in the 1960s. One of these, with its accordion-type folding convertible top, was a centre of attention in Delhi's Connaught Place for a while. While in Delhi it was his habit to drive himself, especially when it came to going to Parliament, where he would enter by Gate No. 4 and park his car himself, as far as possible.

Later, however, it was a Fiat that Karni Singh was most often found driving. His elder daughter, Rajyashree Kumari, recalls one of his visits to London, when he tried to convince her that she should import an Indian-made Fiat and drive that around London He only laughed when she expostulated with him and reminded him of all the different fancy cars he had so loved to drive himself in his 'pre-Fiat' period!

An appreciation of art and aesthetics had also formed part of Karni Singh's training as a prince, for while neither Maharaja Ganga Singh nor Maharaja Sadul Singh were artists themselves, they had both had a fondness for beautiful objets d'arts, architecture, decorations and everything that was aesthetically pleasing.

In fact, any passing artist was always welcome at Bikaner. Maharaja Ganga Singh's daughter, Princess Shiv Kumari, the Maharani (now Rajmata) of Kota, recalls a Hungarian artist who came to Bikaner in the early 1940s, during World War II, as a refugee and was commissioned to make a bronze bust of Maharaja Ganga Singh Unfortunately, the Maharaja died before the sculpture was completed. However, the exquisitely crafted one and a half life size bust of Maharaja Ganga Singh was bought by his daughter from the artist, and remains one of her most prized objects

At the same time, if the men of the Bikaner ruling family remained connoisseurs with no pretensions to being artists, Karni Singh's mother, Princess Sudarshan Kumari, had always been a keen painter, with a preference for painting in a realistic style. She was a prolific painter, particularly in her later years, when she often sat before her easel all day. In her younger days, specially during Karni Singh's childhood and youth, Sudarshan Kumari had favoured a style, that was, in the eyes of her children, uniquely hers. This was painting on photographs with a very fine

brush, paying particular attention to intricate relief work on turbans and clothing. When she accompanied the Bikaner family to Mt. Abu on their regular visits she would spend a lot of time painting in this style and then giving away her work. Towards the last years of her life, her apartments in Lallgarh Palace were filled with works representative of both the earlier and later phases of her painting career.

However, it was not until the late 1950s that Karni Singh himself finally took to painting. The manner in which this happened makes an amusing tale in itself. Karni Singh believes he took up painting when he found that his mother's interest in painting was matched by that of his elder daughter, Rajyashree Kumari, then a child of five who was turning out four to five poster colour paintings a day.

The realisation that two generations of his family were keen and prodigious painters, but that he himself was somewhat of a 'missing link', led the Maharaja to take up a brush one fine day and apply it to canvas. That was the beginning of Karni Singh's passion with paints[1]

Enthused with painting, the Maharaja turned out one hundred oil paintings during the course of the year 1959. In terms of sheer numbers, this was to remain the maximum that Karni Singh would ever execute in a single year. He started off with realism, but realised very soon that his forte and flair was for abstract art.

This was perhaps more a reflection of his personal preference of an art style, however, because in his childhood Karni Singh had been given some drawing lessons by the famous artist, Mr. Buhler. The Maharaja also found that his interest in photography helped him with forming compositions when it came to doing abstracts.

This discovery of the world of colours and forms took Karni Singh into a multifaceted journey of discovery as the Maharaja went through different stages and explored different styles of putting colour on canvas. He preferred oils as the medium for his abstracts initially, but later changed to acrylic melomar American paints. Gradually, he found himself favouring not a paint brush but what he called his 'pouring-on process'.

In his early experiments with this 'style', the Maharaja tried laying out the canvas on the floor, and then pouring out paints prepared in individual pots onto the canvas in a manner that allowed the colours to blend. This method did not prove a success, however, as the canvas would invariably sag and the colours would all collect in a sticky many-hued

mess

He then tried using hardboard in place of canvas. This proved to be more successful. He also replaced regular pigments with ordinary 'enamel' wall paints when he realised how well these enamel paints blended with each other. This 'pouring-on' method produced some remarkable results. The only technical difficulty he had to contend with in this 'style' was the tendency of the paints to overflow in an uncontrolled manner from one side of the picture to the other. It was important, he realised, to control the flow for a couple of hours until the paint settled.

At a later stage he was doing 'line paintings' by taking two colours in two separate pots and pouring them onto the hardboard 'canvas' like icing on a cake. This too produced some startling results over which the Maharaja was quite pleased.

Karni Singh always found himself totally absorbed in each painting for the duration that he worked on it. He invariably would work at a furious pace on a particular work, and even after completing it, would find himself virtually 'connected' to it for another couple of days. This happened all the more when his composition contained bright reds and other vivid colours, or circular designs. At such times he felt as if he had become part of what he was creating This intense absorption in his artistic compositions was in character with the thoroughness that Karni Singh always displayed in whatever activities he undertook throughout his life.

Karni Singh also enjoyed producing collaborative works, more so in the last ten years of his life, when he used to enlist the assistance, among others, of his little grandchildren. Everyone was invited to join in — to pour on a dribble of paint here or a streak of colour there Rajyashree Kumari recalls that if she happened to be present she was always asked to add on something to her father's canvas, and he would very generously allow her to sign her name to the painting. His granddaughter, Anupama Kumari, recalls the fun all the cousins had with their grandfather as they worked in a mad happy group on a painting When the three visiting grandchildren returned to their own homes at the end of their Bikaner holiday, he would continue to guide the three granddaughters who lived at Bikaner, Daksha Kumari, Siddhi Kumari and Mahima Kumari, with their efforts at painting. Daksha Kumari, in particular, matched her grandfather's enthusiasm for paints and produced numerous works under

his keen supervision.

He would also explain to his grandchildren that though the 'pouring-on' method looked easy, it needed a certain amount of concentration, co-ordination between hand and brain, and creativity. If in the later years of his life, Karni Singh enjoyed 'collective' working with as many of his grandchildren who happened to be in Bikaner at the time, at an earlier stage he had, for a short spell, found his eldest daughter matching him work for work! Severe critic that he was, Karni Singh scrapped a lot of his work during the final years of his life, though that did not stop him from making fresh attempts at painting on the morrow!

Having realised that his preference lay in abstract paintings, Karni Singh found that his best works were those painted in a short span of time. As far as possible, he liked to finish a painting in a single sitting; if feasible within an hour. He invariably found it hard to come back to a painting and work on it again successfully, because both continuity of thought process and mood could be lost in the interval and there were chances that his painting would be ruined. Using this work style and philosophy, the *Maharaja* managed to make over 350 paintings.

He even held an exhibition of his work in Delhi in 1965. Organised at the All-India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS) gallery, the exhibition was opened by Sardar Hukum Singh, then the Speaker of the Lok Sabha on April 2. In the speeches that followed, Karni Singh clarified that the exhibited paintings were the work of a 'sunday painter' Member of Parliament and his artist daughter, Rajyashree Kumari.

Miniature paintings of the famous Bikaner School dating between the 15th and 19th centuries AD were also displayed in another hall at the same time, to allow viewers a glimpse of the glorious art heritage of the erstwhile state of Bikaner. Karni Singh had also hoped to exhibit more of his work, but after the dislocation caused by the abolition of the privy purses, and then the Emergency, these did not materialise.

However, even without further exhibitions, Karni Singh's works continued to be viewed by a large number of people, since his paintings invariably formed his Christmas cards. Always individualistic and original, the cards were eagerly awaited every year by the more avid followers of modern art amongst his circle of friends, relatives and well-wishers

While Karni Singh's personal interests encompassed a wide range of subjects, his upbringing also led him to initiate the establishment of certain public charitable trusts for the people of the erstwhile state of

Bikaner, along with a couple of museums. Actually, the setting-up of the museums at the Junagarh fort and at Lallgarh Palace came about as a result of Rajmata Sudarshan Kumari's keenness Sharing her son's desire for conserving the heritage of Bikaner for posterity, around 1960-61 the Rajmata suggested that the old Junagarh fort of Bikaner be made into a museum and a charitable trust.

Karni Singh personally had some misgivings about such an action. It was not that he had any great objection to the establishment of a charitable trust, though. In fact, Karni Singh had set up his very first charitable trust, the Karni Charitable Trust, on May 12, 1958, for which he had given one lakh of rupees (Rs. 1,00,000). This trust was intended for the education of poor children and the welfare of impoverished widows, and so forth It also gave assistance to hospitals, orphanages, zoos, veterinary hospitals and dispensaries, sporting clubs etc. It also supported repairs of places of public, educational and religious importance (irrespective of the religion involved) It was this trust that owned the land on which the Bikaner Thunderbolts Rifle Club was situated.

The Maharaja's misgivings came from another front. He was only too conscious of the fact that it would be his signature — the signature of Bikaner's 23rd Maharaja — which would legally transfer the five hundred year old historic fort, with its myriad of emotional and cultural and cultural bonds, from the Rathore ruling family of Bikaner into the hands of a Board of Trustees.

Speaking about his fort and palaces and other inheritance, he once told an interviewer, "I consider myself a caretaker, because this was built by great men and it has fallen on my shoulders to look after it, and I don't honestly regard this as mine any more, I regard this as a sacred trust."

Having given the suggestion considered thought, Karni Singh called together the chiefs and nobles of Bikaner and sought their advice too. Armed with that, and the blessings of the Rajmata of Bikaner, the Maharaja Rai Singh Charitable Trust was created on October 19, 1961, with much of the Junagarh fort area under its control.

Since certain portions, like the Huzoor Steps, Har Mandir, the temples of Devi-dwara, the land along the border of the Junagarh moat wall and the entire land near the Shiv Vilas garden, had not been included in the Maharaja Rai Singh Charitable Trust, Maharaja Karni Singh decided, at a subsequent date, to set up another charitable trust This

was called the Maharaja Dungar Singh Charitable Trust. This, however, was a short-lived trust, and it soon merged with the remaining lands into the Maharaja Rai Singh Charitable Trust, while the Huzoor Steps, Shiv Vilas garden, Bangla and temple of Har Mandir remained the personal property of Maharaja Karni Singh.

The Maharaja Rai Singh Charitable Trust went on to house valuable antique art and other objects in its museum-collections. Among these were the precious heirlooms brought by Rao Bika from Jodhpur to Bikaner centuries ago. The heirlooms included the famous sandalwood throne from Kanauj, a diamond-studded shield, a sword, the State Umbrella, a dagger gifted by Harbu-ji Sankhla, the *nagara* kettle-drum called 'Bairisal' and ceremonial *chanwars*, in addition to the other heirlooms All of these reflected the glorious past of Bikaner, which Karni Singh remained rightfully proud of until his death.

"Today, to be the possessor of these ancestral heirlooms is a difficult thing to handle," he admitted on a tape. "I have done my best to see that these heirlooms are kept in the museum. ...Of course, the ownership of these ancestral heirlooms will be one of the most difficult things to decide on, ... and consequently, it will be my bounden duty to my ancestors to see that some trusts are created, whereby these ancestral heirlooms can be protected at all times, never to leave Bikaner."

The Maharaja Rai Singh Charitable Trust also became the proud possessor of two aeroplanes of World War I vintage which had been presented years earlier to Maharaja Ganga Singh as war souvenirs. Karni Singh valued them highly, for he was informed that these aeroplanes were among the rare surviving examples in the world and even the Royal Air Force Museum at Hendon in England did not possess similar crafts. He hoped to restore them properly some day. In later years, both the Indian Air Force and Britain's RAF repeatedly approached Karni Singh in an effort to purchase these planes, but the Maharaja remained steadfast in his decision never to sell them, declaring that whoever wished to see the planes should come to Bikaner!

Two more charitable trusts were set up in 1970 by the Maharaja. One of these was the Maharani Sushila Kumari Religious and Charitable Trust, established on August 27, to which the Basant Vihar building constructed during the reign of Maharaja Ganga Singh, was later given. The second was the Maharaja Sadul Singh Charitable Trust. This was set up, "...to provide for the grazing of cows and other cattle in the often

famine hit area of Kolayat Tehsil in Bikaner District," among other things. "This small trust," Karni Singh commented, "was created out of the lands we owned in Gajner, outside the wire-fencing and between the partridge covet." Karni Singh ensured that the trustees of this small trust included the villagers of Gajner.

The following year Karni Singh established the Maharaja Karni Singh Foundation Charitable Trust on January 14, 1971. Created from a corpus of rupees five lakhs, its genesis followed the cessation of the privy purses in 1970, after which the Indian princes won their case in the Supreme Court. As a result of the Supreme Court decision, Karni Singh received six months privy purse amount in a lump sum amounting to five lakhs of rupees (Rs. 5,00,000). The entire amount was immediately made over to the newly created Karni Singh Foundation Charitable Trust.

The scope of this public charitable trust included helping poor students, the educated unemployed, and infirm and disabled people, as well as granting scholarships and grants for technical education and higher studies "One of the heading is sports," recorded the Maharaja in later years, "and for many years the foundation has been purchasing expensive racing cycles and giving them to the Cycling Federation of Bikaner"

Just over a year after the Karni Singh Foundation Charitable Trust came into being, another charitable trust was established by Karni Singh This was established on March 12, 1972, by the name of the Maharaja Ganga Singhji Charitable Trust. Like the other trusts, this encompassed a range of activities, among them the promotion of research work, establishment of libraries and museums, and furthering the maintenance and preservation of natural and historical monuments. Musing about it, Karni Singh noted that, "The trust includes most of the Lallgarh Palace *outhouses, the land outside, and Sadul Niwas and Karni Niwas*"

The last trust that Karni set up was named after the granddaughter with whom he had an special bond, Anupama. The Princess Anupama Kumari Public Charitable Trust was founded on November 6, 1986. Its objectives included providing facilities of education and livelihood to the poor, sick, handicapped, retarded and deserving needy children or adults, and other public utility works. Besides this, it also provided aid for the care of birds and animals and supported similar acts of public benefit.

Given his interest in establishing trust funds which could be used for charitable works, Karni Singh was particularly pleased when his elder

daughter, following her marriage, created the Princess Rajyashree Kumari Religious and Charitable Trust from her own funds much along the lines of the Maharani Sushila Kumari Religious and Charitable Trust.

At the same time, Karni Singh also donated and loaned a number of objects from his personal collection for displaying in the Maharaja Sri Sadul Singhji Museum within Lallgarh Palace, and in the museum at the Fort, for the benefit of visitors coming to Bikaner. It was in the same spirit that he loaned the famous Anup Sanskrit Library collection to Maharaja Ganga Singhji Trust, so that the ancient manuscripts could remain available to all scholars from near and far.

With the type of upbringing he had received, a sense of history and a sense of responsibility to both the people and his ancestors pervaded his actions and thoughts. This surfaced more and more in the final decade and a half of his life Thus, though he never had leisure-hours as such on his hands, even after leaving Parliament, since there were always duties and public expectations at Bikaner, there was some time to recall the days of his grandfather and father, and to try and preserve the heritage of Bikaner through different ways.

Already by the mid-1970s, Karni Singh had begun recording snippets on audio-cassette tapes for an autobiography he wanted to write. He mused aloud, "It is more than ten years since I have been toying with the idea of writing my memoirs, based on my experience in politics, sports, my having been a prince and having lost the title; all in one lifetime. It is difficult for a man to make up his mind to write his memoirs, because the first thing thought that comes is — 'For God's sake, what is so important about my life that anybody else would like to read about'? Well, the honest truth is there isn't anything all that important about anybody's life, but sometimes a whole lot of situations put together can make interesting reading."

One reason he wanted to place his memoirs on record, he stated, was out of "...a sense of loyalty to my ancestors — particularly my father, mother and grandfather, who were such outstanding people, and I feel that the whole world should know about them, more so the younger generation to whom they have become totally historical figures".

"Princes in general, whether they be in the western world or in India have always aroused a certain amount of interest, more so about the life they lead. Unfortunately, what interests the people the most is often the lewd and wicked side of the human character," he stated. His own

attempt was "...more to place before people the human beings that princes were. I can't escape the fact that I was the grandson of a Maharaja, the son of a Maharaja, and later inherited the title myself. And at the same time, I am proud to say, have had the good fortune of a happy home, both in the time of my parents and grandparents, and later in my own. I feel that perhaps a glimpse of my life might open a window on the lives of the princes, which hitherto have been read about by the public in more sensational books, which give only a lopsided view."

On the same tape, he added that while his attempted at his autobiography was "...really a book written by Citizen Joe, [it] has some experiences not available to everyone and an upbringing which is perhaps difficult to come by for every person, for understandable reasons. Over and above that, this could be the life of any human being who was present to see the end of one kind of life-style and system, in itself centuries old, and to see the birth of a new nation — India, in its own right, and to see the decadence that we see around us today."

Consequently, over the course of the next decade Karni Singh often recorded incidents from his life on audio-cassettes. Along with this, he launched a project of taping the memoirs of some of the senior citizens of Bikaner — the older staff and other citizens who had seen the era of Maharajas Ganga Singh and Sadul Singh His objective was very clear As a student of history, none knew better than him how useful and important eye-witness accounts or authenticated accounts can be for understanding an earlier period. This oral history of a bygone Bikaner, he believed, needed to be preserved for posterity so that it could be referred to at any stage in the future

The tape-recording was undertaken through the Maharaja Ganga Singhji Charitable Trust. Among the people whose reminiscences were recorded was Mr. Sapat, who had served in Bikaner during the reign of Maharaja Ganga Singh, and who died only a month or so after putting down his memories on three tapes. Others who were taped included Thakur Jeoraj Singh, Thakur Kishan Singh, and many other senior courtiers. The recollections of Roop Shankar, who was associated with Maharaja Ganga Singh's period and Thakur Guman Singh, who had accompanied Maharaja Sadul Singh to Africa and had an absolutely incredible collection of 'hunting tales' with which he fascinated the younger generations, were similarly recorded.

Reviving some of the old marches and songs that had been prevalent

daughter, following her marriage, created the Princess Rajyashree Kumari Religious and Charitable Trust from her own funds much along the lines of the Maharani Sushila Kumari Religious and Charitable Trust.

At the same time, Karni Singh also donated and loaned a number of objects from his personal collection for displaying in the Maharaja Sri Sadul Singhji Museum within Lallgarh Palace, and in the museum at the Fort, for the benefit of visitors coming to Bikaner. It was in the same spirit that he loaned the famous Anup Sanskrit Library collection to Maharaja Ganga Singhji Trust, so that the ancient manuscripts could remain available to all scholars from near and far.

With the type of upbringing he had received, a sense of history and a sense of responsibility to both the people and his ancestors pervaded his actions and thoughts. This surfaced more and more in the final decade and a half of his life. Thus, though he never had leisure-hours as such on his hands, even after leaving Parliament, since there were always duties and public expectations at Bikaner, there was some time to recall the days of his grandfather and father, and to try and preserve the heritage of Bikaner through different ways.

Already by the mid-1970s, Karni Singh had begun recording snippets on audio-cassette tapes for an autobiography he wanted to write. He mused aloud, "It is more than ten years since I have been toying with the idea of writing my memoirs, based on my experience in politics, sports, my having been a prince and having lost the title; all in one lifetime. It is difficult for a man to make up his mind to write his memoirs, because the first thing thought that comes is — 'For God's sake, what is so important about my life that anybody else would like to read about'? Well, the honest truth is there isn't anything all that important about anybody's life, but sometimes a whole lot of situations *put together can make interesting reading.*"

One reason he wanted to place his memoirs on record, he stated, was out of "...a sense of loyalty to my ancestors — particularly my father, mother and grandfather, who were such outstanding people, and I feel that the whole world should know about them, more so the younger generation to whom they have become totally historical figures".

"Princes in general, whether they be in the western world or in India have always aroused a certain amount of interest, more so about the life they lead. Unfortunately, what interests the people the most is often the lewd and wicked side of the human character," he stated. His own

attempt was "...more to place before people the human beings that princes were. I can't escape the fact that I was the grandson of a Maharaja, the son of a Maharaja, and later inherited the title myself. And at the same time, I am proud to say, have had the good fortune of a happy home, both in the time of my parents and grandparents, and later in my own. I feel that perhaps a glimpse of my life might open a window on the lives of the princes, which hitherto have been read about by the public in more sensational books, which give only a lopsided view."

On the same tape, he added that while his attempted at his autobiography was "...really a book written by Citizen Joe, [it] has some experiences not available to everyone and an upbringing which is perhaps difficult to come by for every person, for understandable reasons. Over and above that, this could be the life of any human being who was present to see the end of one kind of life-style and system, in itself centuries old, and to see the birth of a new nation — India, in its own right, and to see the decadence that we see around us today."

Consequently, over the course of the next decade Karni Singh often recorded incidents from his life on audio-cassettes. Along with this, he launched a project of taping the memoirs of some of the senior citizens of Bikaner — the older staff and other citizens who had seen the era of Maharajas Ganga Singh and Sadul Singh. His objective was very clear. As a student of history, none knew better than him how useful and important eye-witness accounts or authenticated accounts can be for understanding an earlier period. This oral history of a bygone Bikaner, he believed, needed to be preserved for posterity so that it could be referred to at any stage in the future.

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Reviving some of the old marches and songs that had been prevalent

in the Bikaner of his childhood, was also one of Karni Singh's interests. During the 1970s, a new brass band was brought together under the aegis of the Maharaja Ganga Singhji and Maharaja Rai Singhji Charitable Trusts, and some of the special marches which had been played during the reign of Maharaja Ganga Singh and his successor were tracked down and revived.

Karni Singh remembered those long ago banquets at Bikaner during his grandfather's time, when Mr. James and the Ganga Risala band would strike up a special march, reserved for such ceremonial occasions, as the Maharaja and his guests left the dining room. Those banquets had provided a glimpse of Buckingham Palace at Bikaner's Lallgarh Palace, since Maharaja Ganga Singh, always a stickler for the proper way to do something, had observed how large banquets and parties were organised by the British during his visits to England, and recreated the effect in his desert-capital.

He also recalled how during the course of Maharaja Ganga Singh's long reign, "...it was decided that Bikaner should have its own national anthem. Subsequently, a national anthem was created with the help of select musicians and modern bands. The anthem was liked by the people and later a gramophone record of it was also produced. This anthem was played frequently at various occasions thereafter right up to the integration of Bikaner." Later on, Karni Singh sometimes heard the anthem played in his honour at functions by some of the police bands, or at some of the army messes, until gradually the practice ended and the anthem was relegated to the realms of memorabilia.

Given the fact that Maharaja Sadul Singh of Bikaner had been the first Indian ruler to sign the 'Instrument of Accession' to the newly independent India, his son Karni Singh remained a loyal Indian patriot for the remainder of his life. In this, he was also upholding the traditional Rajput notion of unwavering support or loyalty to a person or a cause, once such a promise had been given.

Not unnaturally, therefore, Karni Singh was pained by instances of corruption in the India of the 1970s and '80s, and power-hungry politicians, just as he had been by the incident of the so-called insult to the Indian national flag by the ruler and people of Bikaner in 1949.

Soon after the Integration in 1949, Maharaja Sadul Singh went to London for medical treatment Some months later, when he returned to Bikaner for his birthday, he proceeded to the temple of Lakshminathji

in a car, accompanied by his heir. It was amongst the first public appearances of Maharaja Sadul Singh after the integration of Bikaner, and the people lined the streets and lanes to greet him.

"On the way," Karni Singh recalled, "apparently at the railway crossing near Dungar College, some Congressman pulled down the Indian flag and blamed the ruler and people of Bikaner for having insulted the national flag. This was, of course, absolute nonsense, because Maharaja Sadul Singh's role in the integration of the Indian princely states was well known." The incident led to lengthy correspondence with the Ministry of State, and since the allegation was easily refuted, the matter eventually died down. However, the fact that his loyalty could be suspect caused Sadul Singh as much pain as it did his son, Karni Singh.

However, even though he was upset over broken promises and unkept words on the part of the government of India, beginning with the integration and his father's feeling of betrayal and going on to the abolition of privy purses, de-recognition of rulers and abrogation of articles 291, 362 and 366(22) in his later years, Karni Singh never came out in opposition to the India nation.

On the contrary, as he recorded in his memoirs of his shooting career, wearing the colours of his country and seeing the Indian tricolour flag held proudly aloft in the march-pasts gave him a feeling of extreme pride and joy. There were several occasions on which Karni Singh had carried the national flag, and he had always deemed it a privilege Once, in July 1972, he was asked by an interviewer to compare India with other countries of the world. Karni Singh's forthright reply was, "I am prejudiced. I am a proud Indian ... and the more I travel abroad, the more I think that the greatest country is our own."

There remained pain, however, whenever something drastically wrong happened in his beloved country, or when some step that he perceived to be unwise was taken.

In the decades following the Integration of Bikaner with India, many changes had come to Bikaner. While Karni Singh was inherently a forward-looking man, rather than one given to living out his life on the lost splendour of past glories, in his post-Parliament years he could not help but think of the positive achievements of his grandfather and father with a touch of nostalgia.

An aging Karni Singh remembered only too clearly how, in his childhood and youth, Bikaner, like the rest of India, had been profoundly

influenced by its association with the British. This was true of both the reign of his grandfather and father.

Among other things, he recalled, that, "Club life and foreign sports became quite popular and were encouraged at all levels including schools and colleges. During Maharaja Ganga Singh's reign, perhaps influenced by his trips abroad, modern westernised dress was introduced in Bikaner and officers and the royal family often dressed in modern western style although the Indian style, *achkan* and *safa*, continued to be worn on ceremonial occasions".

In his 1974 book on *The Relations of the House of Bikaner* Karni Singh had already commented about the fact that, "Western music also invaded the cultural life of Bikaner and it was not an uncommon sight to see western ballroom dances in the clubs and at big dinner parties at the palaces. The Ganga Risala had one of the finest military bands in the country and was on occasions specially requested at Abu, the seat of Agent to the Governor-General for Rajputana, during the summer months. Maharaja Sadul Singh also maintained a seven-piece orchestra, which played western symphonic music as also western dance music. This was greatly appreciated by Lord Mountbatten when he visited Bikaner in 1948 and heard the orchestra play both western symphonic and Indian classical music during lunch and dinner. Equally popular was the Sadul Light Infantry Bag Pipe admired greatly by the public on march-pasts and public processions," (Singh 1974:290).

Looking back at his life as a Bhanwar, Maharaj-Kumar and a Maharaja, Karni Singh was only too aware of how much had changed. Though not overtly bound by false nostalgia, and wholeheartedly pro-democracy and popular rule, Karni Singh could not resist from occasionally recalling aspects of his childhood and early youth.

One such aspect was the institution of the personal doctor maintained by the ruling family of Bikaner He remembered his childhood, when the reassuring presence of Dr K.R. Tipnis took care of all manner of ailments from the occasional stomach aches to measles. Later doctors had included Dr. Katju, Dr. Har Narain Haresh and Dr. Mathur. Around the time that Dr. Mathur left, the privy purses were also abolished and the post of personal doctor to the Maharaja of Bikaner was never again to have another formal incumbent.

In his more nostalgic moments, Karni Singh also recalled the impeccably turned out, highly efficient, Aide-de-Camps of Maharaja Ganga

Singh. They had been a common sight throughout Karni Singh's childhood and youth. The ADC's invariably wore uniform while on duty. In summer they wore a white uniform, and in winter the coloured uniforms of their respective regiments. Consequently, ADCs belonging to the Sadul Light Infantry wore a red coat in winter, those from the Ganga Risala wore a white coat with red cuffs, and those from the Dungar Lancers, as was the case with Lt. Col. Thakur Jeoraj Singh of Harsasar, wore blue.

The ADCs were all extremely well-trained men. Their duties ranged from taking telephone messages, to conveying messages to ministers and back to the ruler, to staying in constant touch with Gajner during the monsoon rains to check whether floods were indicated, and so forth. They worked from the ADCs room in Lallgarh Palace while on night-duty, when their tasks included monitoring all the information that came into the palace during the period that Maharaja Ganga Singh was resting.

Prominent amongst the ADCs during Prince Karni Singh's childhood were Thakur Asu Singh (Senior) of Rampura, father of Col. Rawat Singh, and later Thakur Asu Singh of Bisrasar. Other ADCs included Thakur Nawal Singh of Magrasar, who was among the earliest of the prince's guardians, and Sayani Thakur Bakhtawar Singh who was the riding tutor, and one of the few ADC's who didn't wear uniform. Among the younger ADCs were Rawat Singh, Narain Singh and Jagmal Singh, who belonged to different military units. Anand Singh, who was never attached with any unit, also served as an ADC.

Indian and non-Indian officers alike had served in various capacities in the modernized state administration of Bikaner during the reign of his grandfather and father. Some of them he remembered clearly and others he had heard about. When it came to projects connected with the modernisation of Bikaner, Maharaja Ganga Singh had believed in selecting qualified people for a particular task, irrespective of their 'nationalities'. One such man had been G.D. Rudkin, the Revenue Minister who, while laying out the Gang Canal project, lived in a tent in the desert and travelled on camel back during the searing summer heat of Bikaner.

Many of the Bikaner officials had taken up senior posts in the Indian government after the Integration of the state. Among them were K.M Panikkar, who later became Ambassador to China; C.L. Kapoor, the Manager Bikaner State Railway who became the General Manager Railways for Rajasthan; Dr. S.K. Menon, Bikaner's Principal Medical Officer, who became the Principal of the Jaipur Medical College as well as the

Principal Medical Officer, Jaipur, and Major-General Jaideo Singh, General Officer Commanding Bikaner State Forces, who became Rajasthan's senior-most army officer (after the Rajpramukh, who was also the Commander-in-Chief of Rajasthan State Forces).

There were many others too. For instance, Kanahya Lal Sanghi, Finance Secretary Bikaner, who became Finance Secretary Government of Rajasthan; M U. Menon, Private Secretary to Maharaja Sadul Singh, who became the Integration Secretary Govt. of Rajasthan, and Lala Kamta Prasad, Secretary Civil Supplies Bikaner, who became Director of Rehabilitation, Govt. of Rajasthan. Another Bikaneri official and former Prime Minister, Jaswant Singh of Daudsar, later became leader of the Opposition in the Rajasthan State Legislative Assembly — the Vidhan Sabha.

It was a commonly accepted fact that officers who had served in Bikaner, and or those who had trained under Maharaja Ganga Singh, were highly regarded. When Col. Rawat Singh, son of Thakur Asu Singh of Rampura, went to Jaipur from Bikaner, Maharaja Man Singh II of Jaipur gave him an appointment straightaway on the grounds that anyone who had worked under Maharaja Ganga Singh needed no other references or credentials.

Over time, where many customs had gradually died out, other things had also changed. Commenting on one such change in 1986, only a couple of years before his death, Karni Singh recalled how, "The main gates at Lallgarh were covered with proper guards from the armed forces [during Maharaja Ganga Singh and Maharaja Sadul Singh's reigns], and every time we went out we got ourselves a salute. This continued right up to the Integration of the State and also for a few months later. Thereafter, if I remember correctly, 22 guards were provided to the Ruler, which were then converted into police guards. This included Gajner, Vallabh Garden and everywhere. But thereafter, the Government reduced the number of guards to 5 or 7, and eventually even these were totally discontinued, to be replaced by our personal guards. So we had our own sepoys, dressed in uniforms, who presented arms etc. using .275 rifles. Now, after the Arms Amendment Act, when all our weapons have been locked up with the police, our guards are left only with air-guns! This makes a mockery of the 'Present Arms'."

"Of course, it sometimes makes me laugh," he continued, "when I think of all the days of glory. Anybody who does not know the past will

only say 'those were the days of Maharajas when public money was spent lavishly'. But that is not so, because in the days of Maharajas, especially in well-run States like Bikaner, there was always the question of public expenditure. Moreover, if there was any question of bribe and it came to the attention of the Maharaja, that man was either retrenched at once or punished severely. There was virtually no bribery. Today of course, bribe-taking seems to have become the way of life! Also justice was quick in both Maharaja Ganga Singhji and Maharaja Sadul Singhji's time. Anybody who wished to see the Maharaja could walk up to his car and present his *arzi* or petition which was immediately considered. Despite the fact that post-Independence, people have tried to belittle such things, one should remember that this mode of Rulers sitting in a durbar and listening to grievances goes back a long way into history. I doubt if there is a quicker method of giving satisfaction to people *en masse*."

With the passage of time had also come changes in customary celebration of local festivals Karni Singh thought back to the period before Integration, for instance, and the traditional Dussehra celebrations, when burning the effigy of Ravana at Dussehra had not been common to Bikaner.

It had once been the tradition for the Maharaja of Bikaner to ride in the Dussehra procession mounted on the Bhanwra elephant The original 'Bhanwra' had formed part of the famed Rathore heirlooms brought by Rao Bika from Jodhpur It had since been the practice to ensure the presence of an elephant designated as 'Bhanwra' in the royal elephant-stables, and this was reserved for the exclusive use of the ruler of Bikaner.

Karni Singh recalled the annual Dussehra celebrations during the reigns of Maharaja Ganga Singh and Maharaja Sadul Singh, when the ruler used to leave the fort riding the Bhanwra elephant in a procession, and go to a sacred site where *puja* was offered to *Khejdi-Shami*, after which a goat was sacrificed. Following these rituals, the Maharaja, having dismounted from his elephant, would take up a bow and arrow and shoot the arrow at a large-sized picture of Ravana

Karni Singh remembered only too clearly the year of Bikaner's integration when his father had asked him to ride on the Bhanwra elephant. The Bikaner family had retained only one elephant — the Bhanwra — in 1949 after integration had taken place. Soon after this, Maharaja Sadul Singh, who was keeping poor health, left for England for medical treat-

ment. From England, the Maharaja wrote to his older son just before the festive season of Navaratras and Dussehra, asking him to ensure that the connection of the Bikaner ruling house with the people did not diminish with the change of times. It was thus the Maharaja's desire that Karni Singh rode the Bhanwra elephant in the Dussehra procession in his father's place.

Since the Maharaj-Kumar was only too well aware of the age-old custom which decreed that only the Maharaja of Bikaner rode on the Bhanwra elephant, Karni Singh wrote back to express his reluctance to obey this command.

(In fact, though many foreigners believe that all Rajas and Maharajas move about on elephant-back, the occasions on which Karni Singh had ridden on an elephant were few and far between. During the reign of his father, he and his younger brother had sat together on an elephant for certain processions in Bikaner on several occasions, and in 1944 on the occasion of his marriage the prince had ridden an elephant, leading the bridegroom's traditional *baraat* procession to his bride's palace.)

A couple of years after the demise of his father, Karni Singh invited the citizens of Bikaner to take over the Dussehra function, if they so desired. The offer was taken up by a group of people who had been displaced from their original homes as a result of the Partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947, and had come to Bikaner as refugees. That first time, the celebrations were organised at the *Chaugan* in front of the new circular museum, near the Circuit House, and Karni Singh watched the function from the top of the museum building. Thereafter, the Dussehra 'ground' was shifted to the premises of the Stadium, where Karni Singh watched the celebrations from the top of the Stadium.

The main departure in custom, which Karni Singh was only too aware of, became that three effigies began to be put up — namely those of Ravana, Meghnad and Kumbhkarna, and these would eventually be set ablaze. This was a little different to the old Bikaner custom. Nor was it any longer the custom for a Maharaja to lead a procession on elephant-back. In fact, Karni Singh usually went to the Dussehra function in an open car, where after the ritual burning of the effigies, he would be approached and greeted by a great many people. This he regarded as a very friendly and fitting finale to Dussehra

Given his keen interest in the history and heritage of Bikaner, Karni Singh made every effort to participate in functions involving Bikaneris,

or organised at Bikaner. He also supported such efforts financially. In addition to this, he made every effort to keep the achievements of his late grandfather and father from being forgotten with the passage of time. As a result, in the middle of October 1980, Karni Singh organised the centenary celebrations of the birth of Maharaja Ganga Singh, as a mark of homage to a man revered by many.

On October 19, 1980, a function was held to commemorate the unveiling of an equestrian statue of the late Maharaja. This was attended, among others, by the Vice President of India Mr. Hidayatullah, the erstwhile ruler of Dungarpur Maharawal Lakshman Singh, Minister of the Government of Rajasthan Mr. Rampal Upadhyaya, and the Governor of Himachal Pradesh and erstwhile Nawab of Loharu, besides a large number of other guests and dignitaries.

It was in keeping with this same spirit that a group of Bikaneri citizens called on the former Maharaja in September 1983, to tell him about the setting up of a 'Rao Bikaji Memorial Committee'. The citizens were interested in reviving the memory of Rao Bika, and matters connected with Bikaji and the erstwhile state of Bikaner. They also informed Karni Singh that the people of Bikaner were keen on planning the 500th centenary celebrations of the founding of Bikaner for the year 1988, for which they wanted him as their chief patron.

Enthused by this interest in the founder of Bikaner, Karni Singh straightaway donated a painting of Rao Bika, which had been commissioned by the Maharaja Rai Singh Trust, to the committee. He also took a keen interest, subsequently, in the Rao Bikaji Commemoration Committee and the organisation of special celebrations to mark 500 years of the founding of Bikaner.

Ironically, however, it was in the 500th year — 1988 — that the 23rd ruler of Bikaner, in direct descent from the founder, Rao Bika, passed away. In a 56 page 'Last Will and Testament' dated June 26, 1986, he willed most of Lallgarh Palace to the Maharaja Ganga Singhji Trust, so that future generations of people, especially local citizens, could visit and view something that had been built by local artisans and masons, and was a part of the region's cultural heritage.

The end came at around 3.45 a.m. on the morning of September 6, 1988 at New Delhi. Karni Singh and his Maharani had returned from a foreign trip only a couple of days prior to that. Dalip Singh, who was in Delhi at the time, along with Anand Singh, remembers the events of the

final 24 hours of his Maharaja's life as clearly as if the events had happened just yesterday.

"Karni Singhji had not really got over his jet-lag, but he was always a man in a hurry, and on the 5th, he went out for some work around noon, after informing me about some work that he wanted me to do urgently I went away to do the work and since I was delayed, I phoned through *and informed him By the time I returned, he had eaten lunch and gone* to lie down for a brief 1/2 hour rest, as was his habit. Anand Singhji had eaten already, but kept me company chatting while I ate. While we were lingering over the dining table, a servant came and informed the two of us that Karni Singhji had sent word to say he would be going to play golf that evening A little while later, I was sent for."

"I went to his room and found him lying down. 'I have a headache, Dalip', he said to me. 'I think it's because I went out when it was very hot today. Perhaps I ought to have worn a hat'. So I said to him, 'Why go out in the middle of the day at all, when you have just returned from a visit abroad?' He laughed at that, and said I was right. Then he said, 'Cancel my other afternoon appointment, but if I am better, I'll go out for golf later' I came away again and did as he had asked. Not long afterwards — it was 4.35 p.m. I recall, a message came from Maharani Saheb, calling me to His Highness's room. This time he was quite restless, speaking slowly and with effort, but he remained fully in control. 'Dalip, I am not well', he told me. 'The doctor has been telephoned, so go down and receive him'."

"He also told me to open his medical file and extract a paper from the very top. Now this file always travelled with him, but I had never ever opened it before. The paper he told me to take out listed all the medicines he was allergic to. 'Get 12 copies of that made', Karni Singhji told me. 'If I have to be hospitalised give a copy to all the doctors, so that they know what I cannot take'. While the copies were being xeroxed, the doctor came and then a specialist and it was decided to move His Highness to hospital. In the meantime, bed-linen and other things had been packed for him, so he wouldn't need to use hospital sheets It was about 6.30 p m. that he was taken to hospital. Maharani Saheb accompanied him, and I went too, while Anand Singhji stayed at the house to handle anything that cropped up there."

Karni Singh passed away in the early hours of September 6. In a scene that was almost a *deja vu* of the happenings of February 1943 and

September 1950, a special plane was chartered to carry a Bikaner Maharaja's body back to Bikaner.

As the news was announced over All India Radio, a mantle of gloom was cast over the towns, cities and villages of the Bikaner division. Shops and establishments shut voluntarily as a mark of respect all over the erstwhile Bikaner State. Even the small tea-stall owners and small vendors in distant towns, villages and hamlets closed down their businesses to show their respect for a dearly loved Prince and a much-admired human being.

At the same time, tributes flew in from all corners of the world. The national and international press and Indian television, presenting a review of Karni Singh's many achievements, also gave his demise wide coverage "...He had little political ambition beyond the welfare of his Bikaner constituents," wrote one international paper. "...He lost his royal titles, purse and privileges but accepted the winds of change with grace deriving satisfaction and fulfillment from his philanthropic activities," said an Indian paper. Later, homage was paid to Karni Singh in the two Houses of Parliament at Delhi, and in the Rajasthan State Legislative Assembly

The people expressed their love for the man who had served them when more than 150,000 came from villages and towns all over Bikaner and stood in respectful silence in the scorching September heat as his body was carried from the Junagarh fort to Devi-kund Sagar for the cremation ceremony. A warm gesture — perhaps the best genuine tribute from the people of Bikaner and surrounding towns and villages — which none of the family can ever forget

Recalls Rajyashree Kumari, who had flown in from England with her husband upon hearing the news, "We just got into Delhi, sat in the car and started driving to Bikaner. We didn't even bother to think about carrying extra petrol, because there were a certain number of petrol stations on the Delhi-Bikaner road. It was only when we needed to refuel that we realised that we couldn't find any petrol pump open along the National Highway throughout the whole of erstwhile Bikaner state's territories Everything was shut as a mark of respect to my father! We barely managed to get to Bikaner on the remaining petrol!"

Thakur Prem Singh, who had known the Bikaner of Maharaja Ganga Singh and of his son, Maharaja Sadul Singh, states, "The aged people are of the view that they never before witnessed such a flood of people

accompanying the bier. On the coming out of the bier from Junagarh Fort thousands paid their last homage to the Maharaja with tears in their eyes. The people, casting aside all distinctions of caste, creed and sex, rushed to have one last glimpse of their beloved Maharaja who had devoted his entire life to their service. The District Administration was facing difficulty in maintaining law and order, though of course no untoward incident took place."

The cortege was followed to the Devi-kund Sagar royal cremation ground and cenotaphs by thousands upon thousands of mourners. The ordinary citizens of the former Rathore Principality of Bikaner joined scores of national and international dignitaries in paying their final respects to the man who had devoted himself whole heartedly to his country and its people.

*Among those present to pay their last respects at the cremation-*ground were the erstwhile rulers of Jodhpur, Udaipur, Jaipur as well as representatives of other former princely states like Dungarpur and many others. The Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Mohammed Usman Arif, was present too, as were the senior-most representatives of the Union and Rajasthan State governments.

Forty-six and a half years earlier, Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner had made a speech at Karni Singh's 'coming-of-age' banquet. In it he had also offered words of advice to his beloved grandson. "It is not an easy life that a Prince has," he had told him. "He is a life-long servant of that stern and exacting master — Duty. It is only by an adhesion to this principle that a Ruler or a Prince can truly fulfill the obligations of his rank and position".

Maharaja Ganga Singh's speech had concluded with the hope that Karni Singh would "...grow up to be a Prince worthy of the traditions of our House and of this ancient State."

As the flames arose above the funeral pyre no one present could doubt that Maharaja Dr Karni Singh, Member of Parliament, had indeed been that and more.

Epilogue



ON 10TH APRIL, 1993, THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, DR SHANKAR DAYAL Sharma, arrived at Bikaner for a special occasion, he was to unveil a bronze one-and-a-half life size statue of the late Dr. Karni Singh. Made from funds raised through voluntary public-collections by the Dr Karni Singh Memorial Committee, the statue was much more than a formal recognition of the respect and admiration that the people held for the last constitutionally recognised Maharaja of Bikaner, who had represented them in Parliament and won international accolades for his shooting. It was a public homage!

The same day, the Government of Rajasthan announced the naming of the stadium at Bikaner as the Dr. Karni Singh Stadium. It was yet another tribute to a man who had loved his land, his people and his country intensely.

Appendices



Speeches delivered in Lok Sabha



24th Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 1970 (Privy Purses) on September 2, 1970

Sir, It is my intention to make this speech that I propose to make today on a high plane. A great deal has been said during the last two days on this very controversial question. To some people, Sir, it is just another Bill, but to us, it is a thousand year old history, it is our culture, it is our heritage and we feel strongly about it.

The reason for that is that it is not a question of any voluntary gesture that was ever asked for in the last couple of years, but more so, because of the fact that in our opinion the whole thing was nothing but one big threat. The other Dr. K. was produced as a hydrogen bomb by the Treasury Benches and he made a very fine speech. He is my colleague. I admire him for his point of view. There is only this difference between him and me; I am nobody's stooge.

Shri Randhir Singh : Sir, I rise on a point of order. This word 'stooge' should be expunged.

Dr. Karni Singh : I am not attacking any body; I am speaking about

myself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not think there is anything unparliamentary.

Dr. Karni Singh: I am not a stooge, Sir, but if anybody feels hurt, I am prepared to apologise. I would only say this much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Prime Minister herself said that history is being written today. It is because of this that I appeal to this honourable House that when you take any decision on it one way or the other, it must be taken with all the great historical facts as a background. The fact is that on this thousand year old history the curtain is to be wrung today. It is the great history of Rana Pratap, of Shivaji Maharaj, the families that exist today, descended from the family of the great Rani of Jhansi and from the 279 other ruling houses. These are families who are proud of their background, proud of the fact that they stood by the traditions of what they believed in and fought for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, for three years this question of Privy Purse abolition has been taken up on the floor of this House. I can say this much that hon. members from all sides of the House supported us in the interest of Justice, in the interests of fairplay and decency. And we are very grateful to them for their kindness. I am sorry that I have to speak on behalf of the princes myself. I never had any intention to do so, but I do feel, now that this has reached, such an advanced stage, that our point of view must be placed before the House in proper perspective because history one day must also know how we expressed our views

It does make me sad that the daughter of the great Jawaharlal Nehru should now herself be presiding over the Parliament and the Cabinet today to reverse, the very decisions that her father took twenty years ago

I will say this much again that yesterday it was carried in the papers, and it was also mentioned to us by some Members that if the Government lost this bill they would have to hold another election.

An Hon. Member: That has been denied.

Dr. Karni Singh: That again is another threat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been denied that any such statement was made.

Dr. Karni Singh· Why are we afraid of facing the masses? If there is going to be another election, let us go to the polls. Why should we be afraid of it? But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before we go to the polls again, and realising the fact that this is a poor country not prepared to spend

crores on another election or on a mid-term poll, the Opposition is prepared, I am sure, to take-over. If Mrs Gandhi does not have the majority, the Opposition can take over. Afterall, ultimately, a two-party democratic system has to evolve in this country. The unification of the Opposition forces that are taking place today is very evident, today. I would like to say this much that.

An Hon Member: Grand Alliance.

Dr. Karni Singh. The privy purse question is really blown out of all context. The real fact is that the forces in the country, those that are on the treasury benches, supported by some Opposition parties, and those that sit on this part of the House (Opposition) collectively are trying to try out their strength, and the princes are only a pawn in the game. This is purely a stunt. But I do feel, what I said once before and I say it again, that all this privy purse talk is politically motivated.

Shri P. Ramamurti was quite right; he did not beat about the bush; he came right down to the point. And I will say this much that from the 1967 elections onwards, you know perfectly well what happened in Madhya Pradesh, in Rajasthan, etc; a demand grew up to declare the privy purse as an office of profit Why? It was because the 'Chairocrats' wanted to stay in power. Now, what I want to ask is this. At the end of four general elections, why did they make a demand for declaring the privy purse as an office of profit? They should have done it in 1952. But it so happened that some princes particularly the ones who believed in what I shall call the people's point of view were able to go and fight for people's interests got elected and threw out the Congress from power, And naturally, a very astute politician like Shri Y.B. Chavan realised that the image and the myth of the princes, if you like to call it that, had to be destroyed. If Shri Y.B. Chavan was serious about privy purse abolition he could have told the princes before the 1967 elections that we 'believe we should do this'. But, no, he did not do that. But he waited till he put up his own candidate and the Rajamata of Kolhapur beat him. Shri Y.B Chavan thought that even if an old lady of 70 could beat the Home Minister's candidate in his area, surely this image had to be destroyed That was where democracy parted company with the Congress people. It is because of this political vendetta motivation that we are opposing it.

If Shri Y.B. Chavan had taken the same line that the Prime Minister has taken — I like the line that the Prime Minister has taken, and I say

that if Shri YB. Chavan had taken the same line without putting his foot out and saying 'Kiss it', I am sure that we would have cut our necks and put them down on a plate before him. But no decent man with self-respect is going to kiss any body's foot in this age of democracy. And Shri Y.B. Chavan instead of dealing with princes like honourable and sensible men should be treated with scorn. I remember I was once at the negotiating tables, but I am no longer in it, At that meeting, it was mentioned to Shri Y.B. Chavan that 'surely' you should realise that you are in no position to give any compensation, because you do not know how long you yourself will be in power. If you yourself are removing these guarantees which are enshrined in the Constitution, for God' sake, what is your own word worth?

I asked Shri Chavan myself: 'If you give me a guarantees, I will say it will last a week or ten days' This is so because he is not there in a position to carry it out. Since they now carry on with a minority government I remember on the floor of the house I had once asked that the opposition must come into a National government I said 'may be we could have a nationalised government'. Shri Chavan said, 'No.' You try a government with the Communists And here they are sitting in power with the help of the communists.

These are political expediences and we can understand it

Shri Dhireswar Kalita: He has understood now, Dr Karni Singh· Something has been said about the princes having a great deal of money to throw in to politics. I would like to ask you: can anybody match the power of patronage that government has? Shrimati Gandhi is in power today. If she were to leave that seat and part company, it may take her 20 years to come back to power The power of pattronge is tremendous Let us not ignore this fact. Not even the 279 Privy Purse holders can match one iota of the power that the great Prime Minister wields today. It is understandably so. I believe that even aeroplanes were despatched to Kerala — I am subject to correction — to get friends to come and vote today. The government has aeroplanes at its disposal. This story may be untrue, but it is within her powers to do so, which the Opposition cannot.

The Prime Minister has been calling Independant members to her chamber trying to coerce them. Why? I know that during the Rabat debate, I was one of those who decided, amongst other members of my group to help keep the Prime Minister in power, because we thought she believed in democracy, that we had to strengthen her hands We sup-

ported her. But after that, she seems to have taken it for granted that we are her lackeys. One by one, Independent Members are summoned to her chamber. What kind of democracy is this? Even the dependents will have to decide for themselves whether they are to join the Congress Party or sit as Independents as part of the opposition, because every Independent has fought a Congress candidate or most of them have done so. It has been said that the princes have outlived their use. I do not want to go in to that argument. But I will just ask Shri Chavan one question. Why are the Princes today still popular with the people? I must explain this.

Last January, in my own area, three firings took place in one week; over a dozen people were killed and three dozen were put in hospital I called on the Hon. Minister, Shri Chavan, presented memorandum and requested that he might kindly vis these firing areas. Do you know what happened? Neither he nor the Chief Minister of Rajasthan visited these firing states They did not have the guts to do so. Only Dr. Karni Singh did it. Why?

An Hon Member : They are great warriors.

Dr. Karni Singh : No. I am a public representative like any one of you It was their duty, because they are in the saddle. If they failed in their duty, do not turn around and say: 'These princes get elected. So let us destroy their image'. We work with the people. We are one of them. I go in to my villages and mix with the little children. They treat me like a father They are like my own children. I love them.

That is the feeling they want to destroy, and quite understandable, so. But you cannot destroy that image. You must first give good government before you can make the people forget the rulers. If you want the destroy the princes, give good government; they will be destroyed within a generation

An. Hon. Member: Let us accept the challenge.

Dr. Karni Singh: I am not challenging. I may be finished to-night or tomorrow. This is not the point. If you give good government to the people, they will forget the rulers in a minute. You know perfectly well that after the integration of the states, the integrated states' money's were pooled together and we have been asking for equal development of all regions of our state.

Rajasthan wanted equal development. There were five divisions. It wanted all the five 'brothers' to be treated alike. Madhya Pradesh wanted

the same thing. But what happened? Wherever the Chief Minister comes from, he feathers his region's nest. Then why do you blame the poor princes for getting elected. Yesterday the Hon. Member who opened to bat on behalf of Congress Party, Mr. Nahata, spewed out such poison that even the Prime Minister was upset. I am very happy to see that I wish she had picked a better man to open the innings.

Shri S. M. Bannerjee: He was a left hander

Dr. Karni Singh: However, I would say only this much that Mr. Nahata talked about certain atrocities that were committed by the former rulers and said that people were killed in jail and firings took place. I would like to ask him to tell the House how many firings took place in his own state Jodhpur where he came from. I have got a whole lot of firings that have taken place in the last ten days alone. They are so many that I cannot read them. Somebody said that I was a good clay pigeon shooter, but this government certainly beats me.

I would like to place before the House one or two more facts The Hon. Member Mr. Nahata came from Jodhpur Division One or two years after the integration of the Jodhpur state, the young Maharaja who was my own age then, 27, joined the opposition forces fought the Congress and won 31 out of 34 seats If he and his father were terrible people I doubt if the people would have voted that way So, I think we have to look at facts and understand them. Let us not be too bitter about these things If you work for the people, you will get the votes. If you do not work for them you will not get the votes. Let us not ignore one fact. No matter what you may say about democracy, if the father is a good man, the son will benefit. The fact that the hon. Prime Minister sits on that side, 90 percent of it, is due to the fact that she is Jawaharlal's daughter What is there to be ashamed of? I am sitting here today because I am my father's son, he was a good man, my grandfather was a good man.

Dr. Karan Singh made a statement to say that his father helped to consolidate the country. I am very proud, because his father and my father were close friends. I would like to remind the hon. House that my father was the first to sign the Instrument of Accession bringing the State in to India. His father was almost the last His father delayed the accession to such an extent that the country is in the predicament that it is in today.

Let us face facts, I feel that there are reasons for this privy purse question to be brought up and given so much emphasis because I feel

dispute; and I believe that Mr. Chavan is sufficiently exercised with the problem; the rising prices; unemployment shortage of jobs and food scarcities. The Prime Minister and Mr Chavan, would like the house to believe that by stopping the Privy Purse, the whole problem of unemployment and poverty will be solved. That is a remarkable way of thinking because two lakhs of people sustain themselves for their daily livelihood on the Privy Purse and the rulers do not turn on a shower with money and enjoy it themselves. This money is spent on thousands of people for their daily bread.

Mr. Dange yesterday said that 'you spend more than your total amount'. I said, 'Yes, I do.' And the reason for that is that I am not going to be the man who fires 400 people so that I could save on money for myself. If I have got capital, let it be spent. The wealth-tax is designed for that, to erode the capital. Most of us are paying more income-tax and wealth-tax put together than our income, and if we are left with a negative income figure, there is nothing to be surprised at. There are many men and women, old people for which even the Prime Minister, in her generosity of heart, will not find an answer if they were to become unemployed by stopping of the Privy Purse.

I now will take you back to 1950, when my father died. My father was the first ruler to die after the integration. His Privy Purse was in excess of Rs. 10 lakhs It was Rs. 17 lakhs. I met Sardar Patel and said, 'Sir, will you kindly give this Rs. 7 lakhs that are being cut from my P.P. for the benefit of the people of Bikaner?' He said, 'I am very sorry, son; the law does not allow it. This must go to the consolidated fund'. So, 300 men were thrown out of their jobs and nobody came to their rescue. Today, when you press this button, two lakhs of people will go out of jobs. Please bear this in mind. These are real problems. (Interruptions) With your permission, I will read out a small section from the speech that the Hon. President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who is regarded as a Rishi and a great man, made, about the Princes in general and my father in particular, of which I am proud. It has been quoted; it has been requoted and it shall continue to be quoted because he was one of the greatest men our time has produced. Dr. Rajendra Prasad said:

"The great move for the unification of India could materalise primarily because of the good will and ready willingness of Princes like Maharaja Sadul Singhji.........

I am proud to be son of that great men... "to participate in Consti-

union making and send their representatives to the Constituent Assembly of India. It was a difficult task, too difficult to be described in words, because but for this kind of wilful co-operation India might have remained split in several bits. It redounds to the credit of the late Maharaja of Bikaner that by his bold decision he gave a correct and timely lead to other Princes. This eventually resulted in the accession of not only Bikaner but also other princely States to India. Therefore, India is, and will remain indebted to him. When the history of that period is written, it will be recorded therein that at a time when India was faced, on the one hand, with the calamity of partition and, on the other, with the dangerous possibility of Balkanisation, Maharaja Sadul Singhji prompted by farsightedness and the most patriotic of motives stood firm like a rock and averted that possibility.' You can also repudiate Dr. Rajendra Prasad today it wouldn't surprise me. He was your President too but there is nothing to stop you from saying that he was nobody. It is a free country.

There is one more thing. I feel that the Prime Minister might like to take a more defined and realistic approach to this question, and that is in regard to Sikkim and Bhutan. The Communist Benches have been keeping quiet about Sihanouk. He was also a prince. But they are still for him.

May I remind the Hon. House that although I concede that there were some small differences in the position of the rulers of Sikkim and Bhutan as compared to other Rulers, the fact still remains that they sat in the Chamber of Princes and occupied a position in some cases lower than that of many Indian rulers. Trying to be consistent, I would like to know whether the government proposes now to extend the merger scheme to Sikkim and Bhutan or they are too scared.

Is it their desire to whip their own loyal citizens and keep the others who kept away as Kings? You must have seen pictures of the Prime Minister going to the airport to receive the King of Bhutan and the King of Sikkim. She comes home and plants a kick on the back of the loyal rulers. What kind of ethics is it?

As far as the rulers were concerned, our dealings were with the Home Ministry. When the Home Ministry turned round against us and instead of handshake stuck out their foot and kicked us, although in today's situation it is understandable but still it is something that you cannot accept. The fact remains, as the saying goes in Rajasthani "The fence

destroying the field". The Home Ministry is our custodian. When Mr. Chavan was Home Minister, our entire rights were to be safeguarded by him. He was our father so to say. Yet, Mr. Chavan, instead of protecting us, did everything possible to create a situation whereby the Princes could be humiliated.

I will say this much in justice to Mr Chavan. I have gone on record in having said in this House that in 1965, Mr. Chavan, with the help of the late Prime Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, gave India a tremendous image, having beaten Pakistan in war. As a young man, I admired him for that and placed him on a high pedestal. But when personal vendetta and political motivation came into this question, I was hurt.

An. Hon. Member: Because it touched your money.

Dr. Karni Singh: Money, Mr. Speaker, is the least important. Many newspapers have produced pictures and cartoons showing the Princes dying for money. Speaking for myself, I do not care two brass buttons for money, but principles are involved and we should fight for principles Principles of bilateral agreements are involved. You have agreements today with the Princes, and you can throw them aside, Tomorrow you will have your agreements with trade and labour unions. You will have your agreements with the State of Punjab for continuing its bifurcation. You will have agreements with the new Hill State. Any powerful government tomorrow can repudiate any of these agreements. The five rupee note you carry around has this written on it: "I promise to pay". etc., For God's sake, value your promises What does it mean otherwise?

Piloo Mody: Don't believe it. (Interruptions...)

Dr. Karni Singh: People no longer believe it. (Govt. promises). You know perfectly well what happens to a country which can't keep its words. The Princes have been used as whipping boys. For every mistake made by this government the Princes have to be whipped. The time has come when the record has to be put straight. If we oppose this bill it is not that we are not in keeping with the times. We are in keeping with times alright. I will go a step further. If the people of the former states decide that the privy purses should go, I have no objection. But is it fair that people of areas outside the former States should be asked about it, people who are not going to be involved or affected by the large scale unemployment.

Before I conclude, I will say a few words about the privileges. You are trying to build a privilege — free society. Whatever else it may be,

I admire Mr. Limaye; he has been atleast consistent He is in the opposition and his party did not come to a merger agreement with the rulers. He cannot be blamed. But your (Congress) party did. There are many privileges which are in the process of dying out. We must accept that. Man has landed on the Moon and will soon go to Mars, Venus and all over the space. Times are changing. Dr. Karan Singh was right to this extent. I will say only this much; what about the privileges we, Members of Parliament, enjoy? We have a bungalow for which we pay Rs. 200, but whose rental value is Rs. 2,000. Is this not a privilege? If you make it absolutely free to an MP and no money is to be paid for it, it is alright, but certainly paying 1/10th of its actual rental value is a privilege, according to me.

But if you pay reduced rent, it is a privilege. Something was said about income-tax free incomes. We draw Rs. 51 a day income-tax free There are many rulers in this country today whose total privy purses are less than our MP's income-tax free income.

These privileges do exist. I agree that in course of time these privileges will also disappear; so will those of the rulers, but I feel that it is not fair for us not to realise the fact that people living in glass should throw stones at others

There is one privilege which, I have felt, has been misused in this House. We have freedom of speech. For whatever we say about anybody on the floor of the House, we cannot be sued in a court of law for libel or defamation. The Princes also cannot be sued in a court of law without the permission of the Home Ministry in civil suits but permission is easily forthcoming But whatever we say on the floor of the House, even character assassination of decent citizens on the street, nobody can use us even for libel. These are facts that we all M.Ps must realise and also realise our responsibility for having this great privilege and consequently use it with great caution. This is a changing democracy Everything has to change. This will have to change too. A very much higher standard of responsibility has to develop in this house so that we realise that we have a sacred responsibility not to slander the man-on-the-street who cannot defend himself. Mr Speaker, I thank the Hon. House for the patience with which they have listened to what I have said I will only conclude with just one remark. It takes a thousand years for any country to build up a reputation of honesty, a reputation of sticking to its honour and of sticking to its word. In the comity of nations in which India lies

it is what you do inside your own country that affects our outside image as well. In support of this I will quote what the great leader, Mahatma Gandhi said. You can repudiate him also......if you wish.

"It is a dangerous thing even for a powerful ruler to break his plighted word Breach of a promise is no less an-act of insolvency than a refusal to pay one's debt."



Supplementary Demands for Grants of the Ministry of Education & Youth Services on August 26, 1970

Sir, I would like to request the Hon. Minister that in the budget that he has just presented there has been no emphasis paid on additional sums of money to be spent on sports in our country. I would like to concentrate my next six minutes on this aspect.

The Hon. Minister has been closely associated with sports and is a patron of sports. I would like to draw his attention to this fact.

Ever since the Rome Olympics, we have been backsliding in one of the most important sports in which Indians held a sway, and that is, Hockey.

Sir, it is a matter of great national regret that a great country like ours, with 530 million people, cannot get their sports organisations so geared up that we could make a mark in the world. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Krishna is here; we were both in Mexico when we saw the Hockey debacle. I am not prepared to believe for one moment that India does not have the talent, the talent is there. But the trouble lies in coordination and the politics that is creeping into the sports body.

Sir, I feel as much as Mr. Babu or anybody else who are hockey experts, that at the Munich Olympics, unless we prepare from now on and adequate funds are set aside, the Indian sports contingent is going to face a very sad future and we are almost certainly going to be beaten in Hockey. I have seen countries like Australia, New Zealand, Spain and

many other countries, playing with us, and they play with Pakistan too. I do not want to sound anti-national, but I wish to say this. I saw the match played by our team in Mexico and immediately after that, the match by Pakistan. Many of us Indians felt that the Pakistan team was a shade better than ours.

Now, if this is perceptibly so, something has got to be done. And, therefore, I wish to draw the attention of the Hon. House to the Sports Policy, to certain revision of our thinking on sports in general in the country.

For a long time, Sir, I have been requesting that there should be a separate Ministry for Sports. I believe, many iron-curtain countries have this Today, sports is being so highly professionalised through out the world that if a country like India wants to keep pace with other countries, India will have to produce super-men and these super-men can only be produced through adequate training If you send a half-trained team and yet expect that we will get the Hockey crown or Shooting crown or Wrestling crown, well, it is not possible. And for that, I believe, the Hon Minister who controls the purse strings of our country, can play a vital role in giving the sportsmen equal training opportunities to be able to complete with some of the sputnik countries of the world.

The Hon. Minister of State, Mr Azad himself has been very closely associated with sports. There are number of persons here who have been sportsmen, including you yourself, Sir, who has been a famous sportsman. I hope the Hon. Minister will try to allocate more funds for Sports

I would like to make one request to the Hon. House to consider; and I know that this is not a democratic request. But, I am one of those who believe that it is against the honour and dignity of our country to be beaten year after year — one must learn to lose as an honourable gentleman But, the sports federations are today going into the hands of politicians. I know something, because I have been closely associated with the Shooting Federation and year after year we have been trying to get higher priority for promoting the shooting sport. But politics always seems to come in the way I would like to say this; that, at least in the next 10 or 15 years, we should have a Sports Ministry and all Sports Federations should be wound up for the next 15 years. This Sports Ministry must have all the powers like nationalising sports & there should be no politics in sports and then we can expect that in the next few years really top class Olympic Sports teams will emerge in this

country.

Shri Y.B. Chavan — Now there is sports in Politics.

Dr. Karni Singh — There are sports which are well known to you. You have got gold-medal winner. You have got Wilson Jones, Gold Medal Winner in Billiards for the individual item. We have a Silver Medal in shooting. We have numerous other items like wrestling and tennis, in which, we have really made a name.

Now, we know, Sir, what happens when a team goes out from one country to another. We know what happened in Mexico. Sir, the immense respect that a particular country gains in a foreign country cannot be described, unless you are there, following your own flag.

I am all in favour of the Indian teams going out and also foreign teams visiting India But I would like to see the Indian teams being given the best training possible. I do not like to see half-backed teams being sent out.

Mr. Speaker: I was in London at that time, and I saw it on television, and I was sadly disappointed. So, I quite agree with the Hon Member.

Shri Sezhiyan: Even politicians should be given training.

Dr. Karni Singh: I believe that this House had once discussed the Mexico Olympics hockey debacle and a sports probe was ordered. I would like to request this House, two years in advance of the Olympics in Munich, that a probe is not going to get us anywhere. It needs a group of men, who believe in sports, who want to see the Indian flag fly, who want to sit down and give the Indian sportsmen every possible opportunity.

The next question is about the participation of South Africa. I feel as much as anybody else that a country like South Africa entering the sports area is making things extremely difficult. But I also feel, because I know that one sports federation...

Mr Speaker: I tried to link his speech with the Demands for Grants, but South Africa by any stretch of imagination cannot be linked with it. Anyway, he may say what he wants to say in the two minutes that are left over.

Dr. Karni Singh: I would like to say that one sports federation — I would not name the sports — has been selected to participate in some big international match. I believe that one of the difficulties coming in the way is that South Africa is likely to participate. I know as an Indian, as one who has participated for one's country, that in a large number of

sports, we can beat South Africa But if we were to keep away from any sports that South Africa participates in, then it means that for the next one generation, Indian sports in the international field is going to backslide.

Shri M R.R. Krishana: The International Olympics Association is responsible for it.

Dr. Karni Singh: Olympics is different; according to the International Olympic Charter, South Africa cannot participate in it. But in the world championships in many places South Africa can participate, and our sportsmen feel that rather than keep away it is better to give our men the best opportunities to beat South Africa on the fields. We beat South Africa once and only time they participated when they came to world shooting in 1966 and we beat them clean. It was a matter of pride to us. But now they do not enter shooting, but they enter in other sports.

What I would request government to consider is to give our sportsmen a chance to go there and try and throw South Africa out of these international bodies rather than keep our sportsmen from entering and then afterwards finding year after year that our sportsmen who are keen to participate lose the opportunity and lose the interest and are completely frustrated.

With these words, I would make a request to the Hon. Minister that sports should be made into a separate Ministry and more funds should be allocated and our sportsmen should be given equal opportunity with those of other countries, to give their best.

A Break-up of Privy Purse



Many friends in Parliament have asked me for a break up of the Privy Purse of Rulers. I am, therefore, circulating whatever information I could gather in a short time for the information of Brother Members of Parliament only

The part played by the Rulers for the unification of India at the time of Integration can be summed up in the words of India's first President Dr. Rajendra Prasad: "The great move for the unification of India could materialise primarily because of the good-will and ready willingness of Princes like Maharaja Sadul Singhji to participate in Constitution-making and to send their representatives to the Constituent Assembly of India. It was a difficult task, too difficult to be described in words, because but for this kind of wilful co-operation, India might have remained split in several bits It rebounds to the credit of the late Maharaja of Bikaner that by his bold decision he gave a correct and timely lead to other Princes. This eventually resulted in the accession of not only Bikaner but also other princely States to India Therefore, India is, and will, remain indebted to him. When the history of that period is written it will be recorded therein that at a time when India was faced, on the one hand, with the calamity of partition, and on the other with the dangerous possibility of Balkanisation, Maharaja Sadul Singhji

prompted by farsightedness and the most patriotic of motives stood firm like a rock and averted that possibility."

This speech was made at a time when the first President of India honoured the people of Bikaner by unveiling the statue of Late Maharaja Sri Sadul Singhji of Bikaner, which was erected by the love of the people by voluntary donations immediately after the integration. What Dr. Rajendra Prasad said about late Maharaja Sri Sadul Singhji is equally true about the other Rulers, who played a notable part in the unification of our great country.

This note does not go into the bilateral aspect of the merger agreements and the Covenants but is rather written to give an idea to the reader as to how this money is distributed for the benefit of a larger number of people and to allay the public mind that the Ruler is not the only beneficiary of these amounts received in the shape of Privy Purse.

There is much misunderstanding in the minds of the people about how the Privy Purses of the Rulers are utilised. This note is designed to convey the correct picture. While the Ruler draws the Privy Purse in his personal name, the dependent members and a large retinue directly benefit from this. It is a fact that a Ruler for example drawing a Privy Purse of Rs.10 lacs would be employing an average of 600 to 700 people counting permanent and temporary employees. If taken at five heads per family it means over three thousand people draw their sustenance from the Privy Purse. Thus roughly an amount of Rs. 4 lacs is paid as their salary alone from this Privy Purse.

When the Integration of states took place, there were many states which were large and received Privy Purses in excess of Rs.10 lacs. On the death of such Ruler these Privy Purses dropped in most cases to Rs 10 lacs *e g.*, in Rajasthan alone in the case of Bikaner (1950 September), Jodhpur (1951 January) and Jaipur (July 1970) from their original of Rs.17 lacs, 17 1/2 lacs and 18 lacs respectively. The Privy Purse of Udaipur was also reduced on the demise of the late Maharana.

There were no taxes like Income-tax, Wealth-tax, etc., when the integration of the States took place, in most of the Former States Areas Today it is so much that Rulers who draw Privy Purse of Rs.10 lacs for example are paying Wealth tax and Income tax totalling from Rs 3 to 15 lacs yearly. It would be correct to say that in terms of purchasing power a 10 lacs Privy Purse in 1950 is no more than 2½ lacs today Further, for example during the last three years D.A. has alone been raised by

Rs 45,000/- while taxes have almost doubled. It may also be borne in mind that when the integration took place, the Rupee was atleast worth four times more than it is today. While Dearness and Salaries have been increasing steadily during the last twenty years, the Privy Purse has remained constant and in the case of many Rulers it has been reduced by the death of the father who signed the merger agreement and to this additional burden of Wealth *Tax, Income Tax and other taxes have been* added making balancing of budget difficult. The reader will realise that the Privy Purse today is actually worth a fraction of what it was as compared to the integration period, twenty years ago.

It would be correct to say that in terms of Purchasing power 10 lacs Privy Purse in 1950 is no more than 2½ lacs today. It is true that the Privy Purse is itself free of income-tax nevertheless the Privy Purse added on to the "other income" if any and the income-tax on the "other income" plus wealth-tax, takes away a sizeable chunk out of the total income left in the hands of Rulers to spend on all their obligatory expenses.

For example take the case of a present Rs.10 lacs Privy Purse holder. Say for example the original signatory Ruler had a Privy Purse of Rs.17 lacs which was reduced to Rs.10 lacs on the death of the signatory Ruler. The present Rs.10 lacs is no more than 1/4 of either the Rs.17 lacs that the signatory Ruler got or the Rs 10 lacs that his successor gets in terms of purchasing power. Add to this an approximate Wealth Tax of Rs 4 lacs. The reader will realise that this has made a sizeable difference from the position as it obtained at the time of integration in 1947 in as much as the balancing of Budgets for obligatory expenses has become almost impossible.

Charities are tied up with various ancient traditions in the States and these are obligatory. Same is the case with ceremonies like the Gangaur Procession, Dashera, Holi, Diwali, Navratri etc , in Rajasthan and many other places. Badberas or Kumbhkalas is a typical ceremony where the Kalas is carried by the women who come in thousands to receive the Ruler and a rupee per Kalas should be dropped according to the custom. This custom has been there for centuries and cannot be stopped by the whims of the Ruler. The Break-up of the Privy Purse expenditure based on Rs 10 lacs Privy Purse is attached herewith to give the clear picture of the situation.

In my personal case ever since my election to Parliament since 1952, my entire income as a Parliament Member has been given to poor

students as Scholarship and nearly 120 poor students are reading on this scholarship alone every year. It is a fact that over a lac of rupees have been spent on this account alone.

The Bikaner Ancient Fort of our ancestors which has been converted into a Public Charitable Trust by me years ago is today a museum which is open to all. I have also created another Charitable Trust under the name of "Karni Charitable Fund" and another religious trust is in the process of being made for the benefit of all religions.

Much has been said about privileges While these are not enumerated here, it can, however, be stated that the privileges enjoyed by a section of people, like MPs, Ministers etc., can be easily compared with some of the privileges enjoyed by the Rulers Most of the privileges, however, are there on paper only.

At the time of integration the Bikaner State although a desert State handed over nearly 1000 miles of Railways, whose capitalised value would run to Rs.30 to 40 crores over 1000 sq miles of irrigated land and the Gang Canal and an army of 4000 people, well equipped besides cash amounting to about Rs. 4½ crores to the government Like Bikaner, similar contributions were made by other States also to their respective governments.

Bikaner was the first State in Rajasthan to have a High Court in the year 1922 and the first in Rajasthan to have a Legislative Assembly in the year 1913. What was true of Bikaner was true of many other progressive States dotted over the entire country with enlightened and progressive Rulers; for example, Gwalior alone gave enough in cash balances to the government at the time of integration from whose interest alone the government could meet the yearly Privy Purses of the Rulers The Progressive Rulers of Baroda, Bhav Nagar, Bikaner, Dharangdhara, Gwalior, Jaipur, Jam Nagar, Jodhpur, Mysore, Travancore and numerous others are well known today.

India in her centuries of history has changed from one political system to another and is presently going through a very difficult period trying to save democracy and to preserve a secular State The princes have played a honourable part in the unification of the country The Privy Purses and the privileges given to them as Former Heads of States should be considered with this aspect as a background, and at best can be called a "SMALL" — I purposely use the word SMALL — price we have paid for the bloodless revolution which has affected the destinies of millions

of our people." (quotation from Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel)

It would be fair to warn brother Members that when voting takes place on this controversial Bill and honest pledges made by no less a person than the great Jawaharlal Nehru, the father of the present Prime Minister, are to be thrown away to the winds it would do well to remember that it will not only be the 279 odd Rulers who will be affected but perhaps more adversely affected will be the one lac or more employees who draw their sustenance from the Privy Purse some of them too old even to be re-employed

Shooting Scores



1952, November

1st NSCC, Delhi

TRAPS	5/25

1958, January-February

5th NSCC, Bangalore

(1) BIG BORE FREE RIFLE (ISU)

Match No. 21

Prone	184/200	—	
Kneeling	150/200	2nd	
Standing	135/200	2nd	
Aggregate	469/600	2nd	

(2) CENTRE-FIRE

Non-prohibited Bore Standard Rifle

Match No. 22

Prone	179/200	3rd	
Kneeling	161/200	1st	Pure Drinks Trophy
Standing	132/200	1st	
Aggregate	472/600	1st	

1959, February

6th NSCC, New Delhi

(1) BIG BORE FREE RIFLE (ISU)

Mach No. 21

Prone	188/200	1st	
Kneeling	142/200	—	
Standing	150/200	3rd	
Aggregate	480/600	2nd	

(2) CENTRE-FIRE

Non-prohibited Bore Standard Rifle

Match No. 22

Prone	184/200	2nd	
Kneeling	164/200	2nd	Pure Drinks Trophy
Standing	138/200	1st	
Aggregate	486/600	2nd	

(3) TRAPS	43/50	1st	Guru Jashwant S Cup National Champion*

XIX National Games, New Delhi

TRAPS	93/100	1st	National Champion* Selected for Rome Olympics**

1960, August 25

XVII Olympics, Rome, Tiro a Volo Lazzio Ranges

TRAPS	183/200	8th

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* Tied with Foussier Claude of France

** Secured 1st position amongst Participating Asian Countries and second amongst Commonwealth Countries.

*** Foreign Exchange for the Indian Team made available by Dr Karni Singh

1960, November

7th NSCC, New Delhi

(1) TRAPS	94/100	1st	Guru Jaswant S. Cup National Champion
(2) TRAPS (Double Target)	27/50	1st	
(3) SKEET	72/100	1st	National Champion Event introduced this year.
(4) AIR RIFLE DEER SHOOTING	75/100	1st	

1961, January

8th Bikaner Shooting Competition
Bikaner BTRC Ranges

TRAPS	48/50	Did not compete for prizes

1961, June 9-13

37th World Shooting Championships
Oslo LovenSkjold Banen Ranges

WORLD SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP*

(A) TRAPS	290/300	13th	Tied with six others
(B) RUNNING DEER DOUBLES	199/250	16th	

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* Dr. Karni Singh formed one-man team at Oslo

** At a function held in the upper rooms of the Parliament House in Delhi, the Prime Minister Shri Jawahar Lal Nehru presented to Dr Karni Singh a silver salver on behalf of the Organising Committee of the NRAI in appreciation of his achievements in Oslo.

MASTER SHOOTERS BADGE*

(A) TRAPS

(B) SKEET	95/100	Qualified	Gold Badge
	48/50	Qualified	Gold Badge
(C) RUNNING DEER DOUBLES			
	81/100	Qualified	Gold Badge
(D) RUNNING DEER SINGLES			
	88/100	Qualified	Gold Badge Equal to 5th Position

1961, November

8th NSCC New Delhi

(1) OLYMPIC TRAPS	198/200	1st	P.M's Trophy
(2) SKEET	88/100	1st	
(3) BIG BORE FREE RIFLE			
Standing Position	147/200	1st	

1962, March 14

Honoured with the Arjun Award at Rashtrapati Bhawan by the President of India.

1962, August

Selection Trials for Cairo World Shooting Championships, New Delhi

TRAPS	199/200	Qualified	New National Record

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* A glass flower-bowl was also awarded to Dr Karni Singh as an additional prize at Oslo.

1962, October

38th World Shooting Championship, Cairo/Dokki Trap Ranges

TRAPS*	293/300	World Vice Champion Tied for gold medal with Zimenko of the USSR *Tie scores* Zimenko – 25+25+24+22 = 98/100 Gold Dr. Karni Singh – 25+25+24+22 = 96/100 Silver

MASTER SHOOTERS BADGE**

TRAPS	95/100	Qualified	Gold Badge

1963, April 6-11

9th NSCC, New Delhi

TRAPS#	99/100	1st	P.M.Trophy.
22 PISTOL RAPID FIRE	284/300	1st	Gold Medal.

1963, September

3-Man Trap team with Dr. Karni Singh as Captain selected for Tokyo Pre-Olympics.

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* Longest tie-shoot in the history of shooting sport.

** Highest internationally recorded Asian Shooter's score on 1st 200 targets 197/200

\# As Vice-President of the NRAI, Dr. Karni Singh:
(1) Designed and introduced many new trophies
(2) Introduced Indian Rules Traps.

1963, October

Pre-Olympics, Tokyo Morayama Clay Pigeon Ranges

(A) PRE-OLYMPICS

TRAPS	180/200	17th in tie	

(B) MASTER SHOOTERS BADGE

TRAPS	97/100	Qualified.	Gold Badge.

9th Bikaner Shooting Championship, New Delhi

BTRC Top Shooters did not participate to maintain precedence of giving chance to younger shooters

1964, February

10th NSCC, Calcutta

TRAPS	196/200	1st	P.M. Trophy

Preliminary Selection Trials for Tokyo Olympics, Calcutta

TRAPS	186/200	
SKEET	186/200	1st

1964, August

Final Selection Trials for Tokyo Olympics, New Delhi

TRAPS	194/200	Qualified

1964, October 10

XIX Olympics, Tokyo Tokorozawa Ranges

TRAPS	186/200	26th	Tied for 23rd place

1965, February-March

11th NSCC, Bhuvaneshwar

RIFLE & PISTOLS	—	—

1965, August

11th NSCC, Bikaner BTRC Ranges

TRAPS	194/200	1st	P.M's Trophy.

Selection Trials for 39th W.S.C. at Santiago, Chile, Bikaner BTRC Ranges

TRAPS	290/300	Qualified.

10th Bikaner Shooting Championships, Bikaner BTRC Ranges

TRAPS	—	—	Did not compete for prizes.*

1966, February 11-22

12th NSCC, New Delhi

SKEET	189/200	1st	Govind Vallabh Pant Trophy

1966, April

SKEET	*194/200*

1966, May

12th NSCC, New Delhi

TRAPS	195/200	1st	P.M's Trophy

Selection Trials for 40th W.S.C. at Wiesbaden, New Delhi

TRAPS	292/300	Qualified.**

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* Did not go to Santiago due to·
(1) Pak hostilities.
(2) No one else qualified to form a team

** Nominated Captain of 4-member Traps-team and also of the Indian contingent.

1966, July

40th World Shooting Championships (WSC), Wiesbaden

TRAPS	287/300	16th	Tied for 13th Position
MASTER SHOOTERS BADGE			
TRAPS	96/100	Qualified	Gold Badge.

1967, May

Selection Trials for (1) 1st Asian Shooting Championships, Tokyo and (2) 41st World shooting Championships, Bologna, New Delhi

TRAPS	299/300	Qualified	New National Record.
SKEET	196/200	Qualified	New National Record.

1967, July

1st Asian Shookting Championships, Tokyo Tokorozawa Ranges

TRAPS	284/300	7th	Tied for 5th Position
MASTER SHOOTERS BADGE			
	96/100	Qualified.	Gold Badge

41st World Shooting Championships, Bologna

TRAPS	273/300	18th	
MASTER SHOOTERS BADGE			
	90/100	Qualified.	Silver Badge

1968, January 13-17

13th NSCC, Madras; National Games, Madras; Preliminary Selection Trials for Mexico Olympics, Meenambakam Ranges, Madras

TRAPS	184/200	1st	P.M's Trophy

1968, February

2nd Selection Trials for Mexico Olympics (2 Sets), New Delhi

TRAPS

1st Set	187/200		
2nd Set	188/200		

SKEET

1st Set	—		Did not Qualify
2nd Set	192/200		

1968, October

XIX Olympics, Mexico

Traps	194/200	10th	Tied for 8th position
Skeet	187/200	28th	Tied for 27th position

1969, February

14th NSCC, Bhopal; Preliminary Selection Trials of World Shooting Championship at San Sebastian

TRAPS	194/200	1st	PM's Trophy
SKEET	193/200	1st	

1969, July

2nd Selection Trials for World Shooting Championships at San Sebestian, New Delhi

TRAPS — Bhopal Selection Trial scores taken as qualifying scores.

1969, October

42nd World Shooting Championships, San Sebastian

Traps	Dropped out due to gun trouble.	
Skeet	135/150	75th

1970, April 5-12

15th NSCC, New Delhi

TRAPS	192/200	1st	PM's Trophy

1970, June

Selection Trials for Friendly Shooting Competitions by invitation at Helsinki

TRAPS Selected but voluntarily dropped out

1970, September

Selection Trials for (1) 43rd World shooting championships at Phoenix; (2) 6th Asian Games at Bangkok

Phoenix Championships boycotted by India.
No Trap and Skeet Events at Bangkok Asians.

1971, April 3-7

16th NSCC, New Delhi

TRAPS*	191/200	1st	P.M's Trophy
SKEET**	—	—	

1971, August

Selection Trials for 2nd Asian Shooting Championships at Seoul, New Delhi

TRAPS	186/200	Qualified

1971, October

2nd ASIAN Shooting Championships. Seoul.

TRAPS	180/200	1st	Gold Medal. Captained Indian Team.

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* *Traps:* Prize received by Princess Madhulika Kumari on behalf of Dr. Karni Singh.

** *Skeet:* Could not participate due to M K. Narendra Singh's Wedding

1972, April

17th NSCC

TRAPS	181/200	1st	P.M's Trophy

Preliminary Selection Trials for Munich Olympics, New Delhi

TRAPS No one qualified.

2nd Selection Trials for Munich Olympics

TRAPS	186/200	Qualified

1972, August 26-10

XX Olympics, Munich Hochbruk Ranges

TRAPS	180/200	34th
SKEET	186/200	36th

1973, March

18th NSCC, Lucknow

TRAPS	190/200	1st	PM's Trophy

1974, March

19th NSCC, Ahmedabad

RIFLE & PISTOL EVENTS —

New Delhi

TRAPS	190/200	1st	P.M's Trophy

1974, August-September

7th Asian Games, Tehran

TRAPS	189/200	2nd	Silver Medal
SKEET	184/200	3rd	Bronze Medal

10th Commonwealth Games, Christchurch

Withdrawn. Being the only one to be selected.

1975, February 22-March 2

(1) 20th NSCC Chandigarh; (2) Preliminary selection Trials for 3rd Asian Shooting Championships at Kuala Lumpur.

TRAPS	191/200	1st	P.M's Trophy

1975, August

3rd Asian Shooting Championships, Kuala Lumpur Subang Ranges

TRAPS	187/200	2nd	SilverMedal
SKEET	189/200	6th	

1976, January

21st NSCC, Bikaner BTRC Ranges

TRAPS	192/200	1st	P.M's Trophy

Preliminary Selection Trials for Montreal Olympics Bikaner BTRC Ranges

TRAPS Qualified

XXI Olympics, Montreal

Did not participate to give chance to younger shooters.

1978

8th Asian Games, Bangkok

Selected but did not participate.

World Shooting Championships, Seoul

India boycotted the Championships

1979, February 25-March 11

22nd NSCC, New Delhi

TRAPS	177/200	1st	P.M's Trophy

1979, September

Selection Trials for 4th Asian Shooting Championships, New Delhi

TRAPS	188/200	Qualified

1980, January

4th Asian Shooting Championships, Manila

Did not participate

1980, February-March

(1) 23rd NSCC; (2) Preliminary Selection Trials for Moscow Olympics, Chandigarh

Did not participate

1980, April

2nd Selection Trials for Moscow Olympics, New Delhi
Did not participate

2nd Selection Trials for Moscow Olympics, New Delhi

TRAPS	186/200	Qualified

XXII Olympics, Moscow

TRAPS	188/200	14th	Tied with 3 others; Captained Indian team.

1980, December

24th NSCC; Selection Trials for (a) 10th Asian Shooting Championships at Nagoya, and (b) 5th Asian Shooting Championships at Nagoya, Chandigarh

Did not participate

1981, March

2nd Selection Trials for 5th Asian Shooting Championships at Nagoya. New Delhi

TRAPS	185/200	Qualified but withdrew.

1981, April

5th Asian Shooting Championships, Nagoya
Did not participate

1981, August 1

North Wales Cup Championship, Chester, Wales

TRAPS	97/100	1st	North Wales; Category "High Gun" class 'A'

1981, August 2

North Wales Cup of England, Chester

TRAPS	97/100	1st	North Wales; Category "High Gun" class 'A'

Welsh Grand Prix, Chester

TRAPS	194/200	Declared winner on aggregate of above two scores: 97+97 = 194/200

Dr. Karni Singh was the only man to have won all these Trophies in one year.

1981, August 7-9

Eley British Grand Prix

TRAPS	183/200	15th	Tied for 13th

1982

Asiad, New Delhi

TRAPS	259/300	II	Silver Medal in Traps Team Event; Flag Bearer of Indian contingent.

1984

Welsh Grand Prix, Wales Chester

TRAPS	Gold Medal

1985, August

Eley British Grand Prix

TRAPS	Veteran's Gold Medal "Senior Class".

Trusts Founded by Maharaja Dr. Karni Singh



I. Karni Charitable Fund

Founded on: 12th May, 1958

Objects:

1. To give scholarships to boys and/or girls reading in schools, colleges in India and abroad — and to give them help whether for boarding, lodging, books, fees etc. —.
2. To donate money in repairs of temples, statues and places of public importance or religious and educational institutions, as for instance, Mosques, Gurdwaras, Sabha or Pravachan Bhawans, Yagyashalas, Reading Rooms, Libraries, places of Antiquity, Hostels, Institutions of or for imparting education, physical and cultural Societies or other like institutions —.
3. To give help on the occasion of natural calamities such as fire, typhoons, floods, famines — and to open relief works —.
4. To give maintenance allowance to widows, crippled and/or orphans or to children whose parents or guardians are unable to support them or to educate them.
5. To help — Orphanages, Hospitals, Aushadhalayas, Dispensaries,

Homeopathic or other similar Institutes —.

6. To help sporting clubs and Rifle Clubs throughout India, to help the institution encouraging tournaments or holding National Fairs, Sports, Cultural Shows and doing such activities as are ultimately for the development and good of the Motherland.
7. To hold fairs and exhibitions and youth rallies, to award scholarships, trophies, or like; to help other institutions — for similar activities and purposes.
8. To hold, organise and arrange religious fairs and functions — to organise national functions and gatherings, cattle shows —.
9. To fund or help institutions intended for preventing cruelty to animals, to give help or assistance — to Gaushalas, Zoos, Veterinary Dispensaries, Hospitals, Mobile Dispensaries.
10. To give donations to other charitable institutions doing relief work for the benefit of the public.
11. To give monthly or annual fixed sums to needy patients for their nutrition or treatment —.
12. To help and fund the religious and/or charitable institutions meant for philanthropic purposes or for advancement of learning or for advancement of the country educationally and scientifically for eradicating evils to society or imparting education for service to the Motherland India and the humanity or institutions working for World Peace.
13. To help or fund the institutions ment for development of the youth of the country physically, culturally, socially, scientifically or otherwise.
14. To give help in marriages, obsequial ceremonies of poor people, to help orphans, cripples, blind, deaf, dumb, paralysed or persons suffering from mental or bodily ailments; to provide Ambulance Cars or to help any Institution or society or body of persons to have a fire brigade or ambulance.
15. To provide for the maintenance and upkeep of wells, tanks, ponds, lakes, diggis, kunds and bawris and to get dug new ones; to provide for filtered water to human beings, or animals or birds or serving cold water in summer at the railway stations, bus stands —.
16. To donate in public funds and for public purposes.

II. Maharaja Rai Singhji Trust

Founded on, 19th October, 1961

Objects:

(a) To grant scholarships for educational purposes.

(b) To collect, maintain and preserve manuscripts, paintings and arts including objects of arts and archives for the purpose of advancement of education and to maintain and preserve national and historical monuments.

(c) To carry on research work and to open and/or help research laboratories.

(d) To impart education.

(e) To provide facilities and help in physical training and sports of all kinds, including shooting sport.

(f) To organise sports.

(g) To help or create dramatic societies, dances or other cultural activities.

(h) To give aid to such institutions as promote national health and impart physical training.

(i) To establish and regulate libraries and to give aid to them.

(j) To preserve the old and important objects and to set up museums.

(k) To amalgamate such Trusts as are conducive to the objects hereinbefore mentioned.

III. Maharani Sri Sushila Kumari Religious and Charitable Trust

Founded on, 27th August, 1970

Objects:

1. For providing for the worship, seva, puja, and bhet etc. of the temple and other places of worship, devlies and religious places
2. For providing for the maintenance of temples and other places of worship, temple gardens, devlies, monuments of public importance and other works of Art, monumental buildings, religious or semi-religious places and properties.
3. For providing for the construction, repairs, extension, addition and alteration, renovation etc. of the temples and other places

of worship —.

4. For providing for the salaries and other emoluments of the Employees, pujaries and care takers etc. of the temples — etc.
5. For providing Arogan, Pujapa, Poshak etc. of the deities.
6. For providing for the purchase and repairs of utensils — and other materials etc. for the maintenance and upkeep of the temples — and carrying out the day to day as well as the special religious and customary ceremonials and functions.
7. For providing for the organisation and celebration of Navaratri, Gangore, Ram Navami, Akha Teej, Gogaji Saptmi, Nirjala Ekadashi, Guru Poonam, Sawan Somwars, Rakhi Poonam, Sawa Lakh Jap, Bari Teej, Janmashtmi, Diwali, Dashera, Holi and other religious and semi-religious or social festivals and/or occasions.
8. For providing for the payment of bhets, rewards, aids and charities to institutions and individuals on suitable occasions —.
9. To providing for digging lakes, wells, tubewells, channels, tanks, kunds, bawris and other natural and/or artificial storages of water of any type on, over or under the ground.
10. To provide for the education of the deserving and grant of scholarships and/or stipends etc; construction, repairs and maintenance of boarding houses, hostels etc. for students.
11. To provide for the payment of pensions, gratuities, bonus and gifts, gratia payment etc. to the employees of the TRUST.

IV. Maharaja Sri Sadul Singhji Public Charitable Trust
Founded on: 8th November, 1970
Objects:

"Whereas the author of the Trust has thought it necessary to provide for the grazing of cows and other cattle in the often famine hit area of Kolayat Tehsil in Bikaner District":

"The object of the Trust is to provide pasture land for grazing of the cattle."

V. Karni Singh Foundation Trust
Founded on: 14th January, 1971
Objects:

(l) To give the Trust premises for University or for suitable educational purposes or for any major defence and/or foreign affairs academics, Government offices and to organise such Organisations.
(m) To provide aid for institutions and individuals connected with the work of moral uplift of man.
(n) To provide aid to cenotaphs.
(o) To create and help humanitarian societies or activities.
(p) To help students for advanced studies or training abroad
(q) To help all creative activities.
(r) To help in modernising and constructing hospitals and in buying modern life-saving equipments.
(s) To help digging of lakes, channels, wells, and to develop and harness water resources.
(t) To aid persons and the families of defence, police and other forces killed or disabled in war.
(u) To provide funds for people affected by natural calamities like famines, floods, earthquakes etc.
(v) To work for the uplift of down-trodden and weaker sections of society including the scheduled castes and tribes, minorities, women, the sick and the infirm.
(w) To aid the families of civilians killed or disabled in war and accidents.
(x) To work in co-operation with the societies, Trusts, Agencies and individuals for promoting human welfare and to do all and every thing that is necessary or expedient to fulfil the above objects of the Trust provided that in no event whatsoever any animals or bird shall be slaughtered in the Trust property.

VII. Princess Anupama Public Charitable Trust

Founded on, 6th November, 1986

Objects:

(a) To provide facilities of education and livelihood to the poor, sick, handicapped, retarded and deserving needy people or children.
(b) To provide facilities in the shape of financial help or otherwise to the orphan and fallen girls, deserving poor women and specially the widows

(c) To provide financial aid in the marriages of poor girls.

(d) To provide aid for the advancement of objects of general public utility, reform and welfare.

(e) To provide aid for upkeep and flourishing of (A) animals with special priority for cows, dogs and horses (B) for birds (C) for fish life. The animals and birds and fish will include both tame and wild ones.

(f) To provide scholarships and books to deserving students for higher studies.

(g) To work for the ideal and moral character building and moral uplift of humanity at large without discrimination.

(h) To carry out other analogue objects.

Glossary



annadata	Literally 'the giver of grain/sustenance'. Honorific commonly used for rulers in most of the erstwhile states of Rajputana.
Badshah	Emperor; King
baraat	Bridegroom's marriage party
Bhanwar	Grandson
chobdar	Mace-bearer and court herald, who used to announce the arrival of guests on ceremonial occasions and durbars.
Dewan	Prime Minister
durbar(darbar)	Court. (The term was also used for the ruler in many Rajput states).
gaddi	Throne; also a seat.
ji	honorific denoting respect placed at the end of a name or a title. In Bikaner it was common courtesy for even the ruler's children/grandchildren to suffix a 'ji' to the names of people who were, otherwise, subordinates as far as heirarchy went.
Kanwar	Son of a Thakur or noble, (from Sanskrit 'Kumar' meaning son; Prince)

khamagani (khamma)	Salutation or greeting traditional to Rajasthan Rajputana.
Kshatriya	A warrior; one who belongs to India's warrior caste.
Lok Sabha	House of Representatives (Lower House) of India's bicameral Parliament
Mahakma-khas	State office
Maharaj	Title given to the younger son(s) of a Maharaja (i.e. a Maharaj-Kumar), upon the demise of a ruler and the accession to the throne of some other member (e.g an older brother) of the family. The son of a Maharaj would be called a Rajkumar (as distinct from a Maharaj-kumar) during his father's life-time, and would succeed to the title of Maharaj upon the latter's demise In turn, his son would then hold the title of Rajkumar.
Maharaja	Literally 'Great Ruler' (Maha+Raja). Ruler of a state. In some of the other Rajput princely states alternative forms like Maharana, Maharawat, Maharawal, or Maharao were traditionally used. The ruler of Udaipur, for instance, was called a Maharana
Maharaj-Kumar	Son of a Maharaja.
Maharani	Queen
Mandi	Commercial centre; bazaar
Mansab	A court honour given by Mughal Emperors There existed different categories of mansab which specified the rank, lands, cavalry strength etc. awarded to a particular person
Nawab	Title of a ruler.
Nawabzada	Son of a nawab.
nazar (nazrana)	Offerings of coins or a present to the ruler on ceremonial occasions as tokens of respect or allegiance.
Pandit	Term used for learned Brahmin; priest.
pargana	Tract of land
praja	People

purdah	Literally a curtain or veil; the practice of seclusion of women.
Raja	ruler.
Rajput	Literally 'son of a Raja', the term has been used from medieval times onwards to denote the warrior ruling peoples of many parts of India, all of whom trace their descent from ancient India's Kshatriya caste.
Raj Dadi	Paternal grandmother of a ruler/Dowager Rajmata.
Rajmata	Queen Mother/Dowager Maharani.
Rajpramukh	Governor or token 'Head of State' in the post Independence 'Part B States' of erstwhile princely India, which had been merged to form larger 'Unions'.
Raj-tilak	Ceremonial anointing of the forehead of a new ruler at the time of his coronation.
Rajya Sabha	The 'Upper House' or House of States of India's bicameral Parliament.
Rao	Title meaning ruler or chief used by the earlier rulers of Bikaner. Also term for a chief.
Safa	Turban
Sahukar	Trader; business-man; mercantile-banker.
Scyce	Groom (of horses).
Seth	Merchant; business-man; mercantile-banker.
Sardar (Sirdar)	In Rajputana, a noble; one who has been granted the title of 'Sardar'.
Shikar	A shoot; hunting; big game hunt.
Sirdar (Sardar)	Noble
Thakur	A Rajput noble holding the title to a Thikana or Jagir (fiefdom).
Thali	A round metal platter, traditionally used for eating and/or serving food.
Tuladan	Ceremonial weighing (of a ruler etc.) against money or gold, silver, gems, etc.
Umrao	A noble; title given to a court noble (as for Sirdar).

Vidhan Sabha	The State Legislative Assembly of Rajasthan.
Yuvraj	Heir-apparent. In Bikaner the term 'Maharaj-Kumar' or 'H.A'. (Heir-Apparent) was used in the 20th century.
Yuvrani	(Also Maharaj-Kunwarani) Wife of the heir-apparent
zenana, (zenan-khana)	Term used for womens' (inner) apartments, especially where purdah was prevalent; pertaining to women. In contrast, the men's quarters were called the Mardana

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